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REGINALD HETHEREGE.

BY

HENRY KINGSLEY,

AUTHOR OF "RAVENSHOE," "GEOFFREY HAMLYN," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



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REGINALD HETHEREGE.



CHAPTER I.

REGINALD'S OLD LUCK BEGINS TO RETURN.

A SECRET mistake, a secret fault, confessed at once, remedied at once, is as harmless as a trifling slide of snow from a roof-top, which falls over the playing children's heads in the court, and makes them laugh. But a secret mistake, kept in one solitary bosom, grows, as year after year goes on, into a potential avalanche, which is a continually increasing source of terror to the man who keeps it and who knows of the existence

of the vast snowdrift overhead. A man with a great secret, kept for years concealed, says every year, as time goes on, "I cannot solve it now; it is too late." Every year it becomes more impossible to speak, until at last the great secret is only discovered by death or by accident.

The dark, sealed room at Bolton Row was General Anders's secret, and as the years passed he was more and more unwilling to open that room. Our readers know already the conditions made by the old merchant as to its being opened. Had he done after Vittoria what he might have done, he would have known the worst. Nothing could induce him to face that solitary fact. He had reason to believe that there were documents there relating to the mother whom he had never known. The morbid fear of knowing more about her than was consistent with her honour grew on him; and at

last warped his judgment, nay, even his moral feeling. The awful words written on the paper which he had actually shown to his old fellow-soldier were bad enough ; but, as we have said before, there was more than he had spoken of.

His fellow-soldier was dead, and he was alone in his own counsel. He had seen the effect of money in the world, and he determined to have money. Knowing only one-half the truth, he thought that he knew all. It matters little here what he knew or did not know, that will be seen hereafter ; but he thought that he must have money to a very vast extent. He took Reginald into his confidence as far as that. Reginald said that they had money enough ; General Anders said that he was in ignorance about contingencies, and that he considered that they would want at least a million.

Reginald wondered, but he knew afterwards that the General intended a great legal campaign about the Digby will. This intention was mixed up with such an obliquity of moral vision as astounded Reginald utterly. Affairs afterwards explained themselves: for a time General Anders, brooding over one theme, did not know right from wrong. It is not a very uncommon case, nor is superstitious cowardice so very uncommon among the bravest men that we should condemn him entirely.

He was very angry with Mr. Owthwaite, and went away. But all his going away could not prevent Reginald from beginning to reciprocate the hospitalities of the county; and he considered that the arrival of Mr. Bevan, the great American financier, was the proper opportunity for a grand banquet or dinner. Goodge, when he heard of it, remembered that he

had a particular appointment in Patagonia, but his clothes and dressing things were removed from his room until he consented to stay.

It took a week to consider who was to be asked first. Reginald wrote down the Barnetts, the Snizorts, the Owthwaites, Mr. Bevan, and Emily Hickson.

Every one except Reginald was dead against the Owthwaites being asked, but Reginald insisted on it, and it was carried.

Aunt Hester then desired it to be known that, if Emily Hickson dined at table, she requested to have her dinner in her own room; whereupon Emily said that she had much better do so.

The eminent and aged novelist looked at that young lady with the most withering scorn, and as if she was going to say something.

“Ah, you are thinking about what you

are going to say," said Miss Hickson. "Come, say it out if you are ready with it, and don't keep us all waiting. You say that if I dine at table you won't; well, as I am going to dine at table I am glad to hear it."

"Emily!" said Mrs. Hickson, setting her mouth at her daughter. "Silence!"

"Don't screw your mouth about, ma, as if you were feeling for your wisdom teeth. You would be as beautiful as Aunt Hester if you did not make faces at me. But I have done. Don't be angry with me for being naughty, for I am not really so, you know. I won't dine at table at all. I shall be certain to say something to Lady Snizort: I had much better not."

She was therefore left an open question. Then, *nem. con.*, came the Barnetts. The list was subsequently agreed upon to the amount of thirty, including the

people in the house. Such as are worthy of notice will be introduced to the reader in the course of the entertainment.

People not used to giving dinners or entertainments of any kind are generally fussy, and make their guests as little at ease as they are themselves. You ought to attend to your guests certainly, but only in an indirect manner; you ought to put everything in order for them to enjoy themselves, and then leave it alone, or to your servants. If you cannot give a properly ordered dinner party, why, then the remedy is perfectly easy—that is, not to give one at all; but ask a few friends to a leg of mutton, they will enjoy themselves far more. Reginald and Hester had no trouble about their guests. They had a trained *stolos* of servants, and were utterly careless of details. Hester was used to grand entertainments, and had

given her advice ; Mary had followed it, and seen to everything. Reginald had told Mary that she must not appear to know that anything particular was going on, and was to try to look as if they dined in that way every day of their lives. He himself was utterly careless about the whole matter, and so he awaited his guests with perfect equanimity ; although he was quite aware that one-half of his guests were, politically speaking, deadly enemies to the other half, and that there was a fearful family feud between the Snizorts and the Barnetts about the right of way through a wood. Mr. Bevan had arrived, and Reginald had seen him for a moment, after which he had gone upstairs to dress.

The first arrivals were the Owthwaites. Laura Owthwaite looked exceedingly pale and anxious, and Mr. Owthwaite dangerously calm. There was something ex-

tremely uncomfortable in that quarter—Reginald did not know what in any way. He had comforted himself with the assurance that everybody was prepared to quarrel with everybody else, and that he would have to bear the blame. He was so used to this state of things ever since he was born, that he did not particularly care. Goodge, too, was there, that marvellous man, who, by good humour, shrewdness, and tact, could manage any one, from a Nile slave-dealer to Aunt Hester. No one of his friends minded anything when Goodge was by their side.

The next arrival was Mr. Bevan from upstairs. He was a fine-looking man, with an enormous jet-black beard and blue spectacles. He was extremely agreeable, but he spoke with a fearful Yankee accent and expression, and about nothing in this world but America and

American doings and habits. He was presented to Aunt Hester, who was very gracious indeed. Poor lady!

To say that he talked exactly like Artemus Ward, would be to deceive our readers; he not only talked like Artemus Ward, but ten times worse. Goodge was very much interested in him at once; he entered into conversation with him, and seemed to take to him. Aunt Hester was rather puzzled by some of his expressions, and Goodge said to him—

“Miss Simpson has never been out of England, and does not quite understand some of your Australianisms.”

“My Americanisms, I fear you mean,” said Mr. Bevan; “for, as we say in the States, I will take my colonial oath that I never was in Australia in my life.”

Goodge had a little more conversation with him, and then went to Reginald.

“Reginald,” he said, “mind that fellow Bevan. He is not a real American at all, he is nothing but a whitewashed Yankee of very recent date. He is an Australian, shamming Yankee—fancy an American gentleman saying ‘my colonial oath!’ That fellow is a thundering liar.”

Reginald smiled; but there was no time to do anything else, for the butler announced “Sir Lipscombe Barnett,” and at the same time, but with a second’s pause, “Lord and Lady Snizort.”

Here was a pretty kettle of fish! Here was a nice beginning! The butler had better have been in his grave than have done such a thing as to announce Sir Lipscombe before Lord Snizort. It was all over now, and Reginald, with a glance at Goodge, resigned himself for an evening’s amusement, knowing that the whole awful miscarriage would, as usual, be laid at his door. Some people would have

tried to mend matters by an exhibition of that peculiarly shallow humbug called "tact"; Reginald knew that a man or woman who exhibits "tact" when both parties concerned in a misunderstanding are perfectly well aware of all circumstances, only makes an enemy of both parties, and is set down as a cowardly enemy by both. Reginald let the matter arrange itself, and spoke to Sir Lipscombe first, shortly and warmly, after which he passed on to the infuriated Snizort and his lady. The horror generally inflicted on society by this very worthy and learned couple arose from the fact that, when either of them were set talking, they neither could be got to leave off again any more. On this occasion, for the first and last time, they inflicted a new and more terrible horror on our unfortunate friends. Neither of them would utter a single word, or do anything except

follow Sir Lipscombe Barnett about the room with a stony and baleful stare coming out of their four eyes. It was horrible. The first visible effect of it was to make Laura Owthwaite, who had seemed extremely ill and nervous before, rise and leave the room hurriedly.

Sir Lipscombe was in high feather, most genial and charming. Having exchanged a good-humoured bow with Lord Snizort, he sat by Aunt Hester and made himself entirely agreeable. Mary went to assist Reginald in the apparently hopeless task of appeasing the Snizorts; but the Duke and Duchess joined Aunt Hester and Sir Lipscombe. Sir Lipscombe told them that he had at last read one of Aunt Hester's novels; he was utterly and entirely converted to her way of thinking on all points. He had been prepared to disagree, from what he had heard at second hand; but her story of

“Jessie” had caused him to throw over all preconceived opinions, and frankly and humbly lay his palinode at her feet, as he did now. Aunt Hester, not being classical, glanced towards her footstool, and then saw that he spoke metaphorically. In short, Sir Lipscombe, with his kind-hearted truthfulness, made himself extremely agreeable; while Lord Snizort, with more than all his brains, and fifty times his knowledge, was, assisted by his wife, making himself a vast nuisance.

As the guests came, however, they gathered about Lord Snizort more than about Sir Lipscombe. They were mostly important county squires, and Snizort was a great man among them. Bevan shone out prodigiously; even Snizort’s airs were nothing to his; his railway company had a concession of land half as big as Ireland, which you only had to scratch with a plough to produce thirty

bushels an acre of wheat. Round the Snizort lighthouse all craft came to an anchor, and listened to the wonderful American as he spoke, aye, and spoke almost truly, as regarded fact, of the great nation of the future.

“We ain’t no better ’n other folks, I reckon,” he said, “but we’ve got the experience of other nations heaped up; and we’ve got the richest inheritance that ever God Almighty sent to any nation. Guess we mean to hold it and improve it. We air the richest nation on the face of the earth.”

A man had joined the group whom no one had noticed—a powerful, tall, pale, and ugly man; if every one had not been so eager they might have heard him announced as Lord Arthur Sebright.

“What, are you here, Bevan, raising the wind?” said his lordship; and then dinner was announced before any one had

time to notice that Bevan seemed not only surprised, but, on the whole, sorry that Lord Arthur was there. It is possible, however, that blue spectacles and a black beard are calculated to conceal emotion; for Goodge never saw any.

The Duke took down Lady Snizort, Lord Snizort Aunt Hester, Reginald a squiress, and Goodge Mrs. Hickson. Beyond this there was no preconcerted arrangement; Mary made a few attempts at order, but the people arranged themselves. The child, Emily Hickson, who had come down very late, and who looked very pretty, went quickly up to Lord Arthur Sebright, and put her hand on his arm. "I want to speak to you," she whispered anxiously.

Lord Arthur was pleased with the pretty little spoilt girl, and invited her confidence. It was of the most alarm-

ing character, but was not given until Mr. Owthwaite had said grace.

Grace before meat, in the hands of a justly exasperated man, is a very powerful engine of offence. We have seen previously how Aunt Hester, by merely reading aloud the formularies of the Church of England, which are carefully prepared so as to give as little offence as possible, could nevertheless, by the mere use of emphasis, launch poisoned arrows of sarcasm and rebuke at her servants' heads. The sermon, of course, allows of greater latitude than any formalized liturgy, and we have seen how the late Charles Hetheridge used to ease his mind in a sermon by denouncing, in the strongest biblical language, people who were not in the least degree aware that he was preaching, and could by no means ever become aware of a single word which he said. The pulpit is a splendid vehicle

for denunciation ; but then the remedy, or counter, always remains. If the denounced one does not happen to go to church, the personal allusions to him fall rather dead,—much as do the personal denunciations of any man in a public journal which he never casts eyes on from one year's end to another. From Grace before meat, however, there is no escape ; you may, and many do, make fifty excuses for not going to church, but it takes all your time to excuse yourself from going to dinner. When you are there, the parson has you, if he is clever enough. Mr. Owthwaite was quite clever enough to make himself a skeleton at Reginald's banquet, and he did it. He was asked, as the Scotch say, to “ bless the victual,” and he did it like Boileau's priest.

He prayed shortly that vain, causeless, and frivolous quarrels might cease between the rich and the powerful of this

world (this meant Snizort and Barnett.) He hoped that those who had newly acquired wealth would not be puffed up by it, but would remember the fatherless and the widow while enjoying the bounties spread before them (this was for Reginald); and he also hoped that none of the assembled guests would ever feel the bitterness of rebellious and unthankful children (this was a cut at his daughter); after which whet to the appetite he sat down.

Then Emily began whispering to Lord Arthur Sebright.

"You are a great friend of George Barnett's?"

"Yes; I have no such friend."

"And I want to be a great friend of Laura Owthwaite's."

"Well?"

"I shall not say one word if you speak to me like that. You know what I

allude to; you,—but you men are so mean.”

“Now, let us be friends. I am not mean at all; but don’t you see, my dear young lady, that I am responsible for every word I say, whereas you are not.”

“There is a good deal in that, and I will trust you. You know that they are in love with one another.”

“I really cannot commit myself in any way.”

“Then I must do it all myself,” said Emily. “I suppose you *are* right; but let me tell my story. They are—you need not contradict me—desperately in love with one another. The thing has been going on long before we came here, secretly, but she has told me, because I saw—well, because I saw them together the first day the Barnetts came to call. Mr. Owthwaite’s son enlisted in the army, and he has some terrible preju-

dice against it. He has said often that he would curse his daughter if she married a soldier, and you know what he is. Mr. Owthwaite and Sir Lipscombe are at daggers-drawn about Mr. Owthwaite's Radicalism. He says nothing better of him than that he is a rick-burner, without the courage to fire the match. This love for Laura is the only thing which George has concealed from his father, who would forgive him anything except an imprudent marriage. He means him to marry Lady Jane Dove, with a million or so of money. It is all arranged as far as the old people are concerned, but George *hates* her. Mr. Owthwaite has discovered it, and has been furious with her to-day. I believe that Reginald might make peace in some way, because he always does so; no one can resist him. Now, I want you to use your influence with George not to——”

“ Well ? ”

“ Not to press her. I am frightened about her. She has used very wild words to me about your friend. Her father has been very bitter with her ; I am sure that you will do your best to keep Mr. Owthwaite and George Barnett apart. Persuade him to go back to his regiment—to go to London for a time to be out of her way. I am sure that it will all end happily then.”

“ Allow me to observe, my dear young lady,” said Lord Arthur, “ that you are at once very indiscreet in trusting so much to a mere stranger like myself, and yet extremely sensible at the same time. I will speak to the young lady herself, if you wish me, after dinner. I know her well, and I promise that George shall behave with the most entire discretion. Where is Miss Owthwaite ? I do not see her at the other side of the table.”

"She must be sitting this side, I suppose. I left her in my room, and she said she was coming down. Where is Miss Owthwaite?" she whispered to the butler, when he came round again.

"Miss Owthwaite is gone home, Miss," said he, "very poorly."

"I wonder why George did not come to-night," said Lord Arthur. "Now, Miss Hickson, we are so deep in one another's confidence through your indiscretion, that we must make acquaintance. What do you like most?"

"My dinner just now."

"What do you dislike most?"

"The ridiculous conventionalisms which would have rendered it impossible for me to say what I have just said to you about two good people, unless I had a will of my own."

"Do you like me?"

"Immensely. They say that you are a

prig, you know, and perhaps you are. But I like you very much indeed."

So they made friends in their way, and their frank friendship lasted, because they could laugh at one another without anger or temper.

Meanwhile the grand banquet proceeded with very indifferent results in other quarters. As it was the first, so it was the most disastrous and the last of all the general banquets which Reginald ever gave. Lord Snizort would not talk to a human being except Bevan, save to contradict flatly. He was only civil to Bevan because he was a foreigner, and that gentleman reciprocated his advances so very warmly that before dinner was half over he had been invited to stay at Lord Snizort's as soon as ever he had finished his visit to Reginald's. He accepted with great pleasure, and my lord called down the table to Reginald—

“I hope that you will not keep Mr. Bevan too long, Mr. Hetherege. He has promised to come to me, immediately after leaving you ; and as his visit is timed to exactly fit a promised visit from your friend General Anders, it will be an admirable thing to make two such great financiers known to one another.”

“That fellow has played his cards devilish well to get the General alone in a country house. He means no good,” muttered Goodge. And Reginald wished that the General was going anywhere else, for he had a painful feeling that he had in some way lost a friend, and that his old General was dead.

Politics took a very violent turn. There was only one very highly talented Tory there, Lord Arthur, and he was taken up with Emily, Goodge, and Reginald. So the Tories made up in denunciation what they wanted in argument.

Lord Snizort was a famous Whig, and had a more intelligent following than could be found in the disorganised ranks of the enemy. The consequences were extremely unpleasant, and every one was glad when dinner was over. Then came the memorable disaster which lost Reginald a dear friend, and did so much to embitter the peace he should have found in his new home.

Belgium is the cockpit of Europe. She certainly escaped last time, but by all accounts the Belgians expect that the next war between Germany and France will be settled in their corn and turnip fields. Why should Belgium or Reginald Hetheridge's house be always selected for the theatres of wars, dynastic and family, with which they have nothing to do. Nobody, except such men as Napoleon the First, who could fight anywhere, ever goes and fights out an extraneous quarrel

in Switzerland—by no means a powerful State. There must be a fatality over some nations like Belgium, and some individuals like Reginald Hetherege, which makes them the natural prey of war. An affair had been quietly going on for some time between the houses of Barnett and Owthwaite; it now culminated, and the principal parties, with an unerring instinct, selected Reginald's unfortunate house for the *dénouement*. He knew nothing of it, and had nothing to do with it; but his neutral fields, so to speak, were the first to be desolated, and the first shock of the war fell on his devoted head.

CHAPTER II.

REGINALD'S MISFORTUNES ACCUMULATE.

MR. OWTHTWAITE had left the dinner table without being noticed, for he came and went in that house like a shadow. The men were still at wine, when the butler came in and quietly called out Reginald and Sir Lipscombe.

They went into the library at the butler's desire, and there they found Mr. Owthwaite, white as a sheet, and looking wild and dangerous.

"Mr. Hetherege," he said, "the sanctity of your house has been violated by this man's son."

Reginald at first thought that Mr. Owthwaite, for the first time in his life,

had been taking too much wine, but he soon unfortunately found that Mr. Owthwaite was perfectly sober.

“My daughter has been here very much lately, Mr. Hetherege. She has been very much in the companionship of Mr. George Barnett here. I think you will allow that.”

“They have certainly both been here very often,” said Reginald.

“With your knowledge, Sir Lipscombe?” demanded Mr. Owthwaite.

“I suppose that I am above being a spy upon my son, sir. He is an officer in Her Majesty’s army, and is not responsible for his coming and going to any one save the military authorities.”

“He is a scoundrel, sir,” said Mr. Owthwaite.

“Your cloth protects you, sir,” said Sir Lipscombe. “Go on.”

“If my son were alive,” said Mr. Owthwaite——

“If *your* son were alive, sir, *my* son would castigate him in the public streets, sir, or call him to account in another way, a way which, as a Christian, I will not mention,” said Sir Lipscombe.

“I am the most unlucky man on the face of the earth,” said Reginald. “I shall have no peace but in the grave. Will you two tell me what has happened, and not stand snorting defiance at one another?”

“My daughter has eloped from your house with Captain Barnett, sir.”

“Is that all?” said the unlucky Reginald. “Well, I hope they will be happy. They are a handsome couple.”

They were both down on him at once. Sir Lipscombe began before Mr. Owthwaite had time.

“How dare you speak of my son’s dishonour with such disgusting levity, sir! I ask, how you dare do it! My son, my

only son, the soul of honour and probity, began his moral deterioration in your son's house, and has completed his ruin in yours. I wish that I had never heard your name, sir. Was it not enough that my son should be sent into scenes which he had never previously contemplated, save in novels—the scenes, I mean, which went on in your son's house at Brixton; but he must be trepanned here, sir, to break my heart. He has had everything he wanted from a boy; he has been everything that a father could wish except on one occasion, when pressure was brought to bear on Lord Hardinge not to force him to sell out. Mr. Owthwaite, to show you how guiltless I am in this matter, let me tell you that I had a splendid match in prospect for him. Let us cast the dust off our feet, sir, as we leave this house, and mourn our mutual and irreparable loss in secrecy and shame."

Mr. Owthwaite had not the smallest intention of mourning in secret with Sir Lipscombe, until he had had an interview with Reginald.

“My child—my ewe lamb,” he said, “was allowed to come and go to this unhallowed house without suspicion, without enquiry. Always the best of daughters to me, we mourned together in secret over the loss of my only son. Never, until she made the acquaintance of Miss Emily Hickson, did one word of rebellion ever pass her lips. Since then she has been different. She has defied me on more than one occasion; she has now crowned her defiance by this act. We have parted, and I am alone for the rest of my life.”

“What are the details of this affair?” asked Reginald.

Both Sir Lipscombe and Mr. Owthwaite laughed sardonically, and looked at one

another as much as to say, "You hear this fellow."

"I should have thought that you knew more about it than we did," said Owthwaite.

"I should have thought so also," said Sir Lipscombe. "But you had better tell him, and indeed I have some remote curiosity about the matter myself."

"Oh, it is very simple. She was last seen with Miss Emily Hickson, and was supposed to be lying down in her bedroom. She went downstairs, and was seen to ask one of your servants, Sir Lipscombe, to see her across to the rectory. The man was your son's creature. Halfway there she was met by him and another of your servants, and they are away together. It is all over."

Goodge had privately followed Reginald and the baronet out, and had sat

down in the room in the dark; he now spoke out of the darkness.

“And what are you two gentlemen going to do?” said Goodge. “You have made a thundering mess of it between you. Sir Lipscombe, you had no right to force your son’s inclinations. Mr. Owthwaite, you should have been more tender to your daughter.”

“You are laying down the law, sir,” said Sir Lipscombe.

“I am, sir. I am speaking for my friend, your son. I have been fearful of this for some time; but here is Lord Arthur Sebright, whom I asked to follow me. Let him speak for his friend also.”

“I am exceedingly angry,” said Lord Arthur, “at George having taken such a step without consulting me. I would have done anything to prevent it. He has done it in self-defence against a father whom he worships as an idol, and

whose good will and affection he calculates on as a certainty, as I do myself; but meanwhile he has put the future Lady Barnett, the mother of your grandchildren, the possessors of your wealth, in a false and absurd position. It follows that both you and I are extremely angry. We shall both get over it."

"And what are my feelings?" said Mr. Owthwaite.

"I don't know what they are," said Goodge, exasperated by the treatment which Reginald had undergone. "I should say that you suffered remorse for not having put the matter fairly before Sir Lipscombe the moment you knew of it. You most certainly have known of it for a long time. You may sniff, sir, but you won't sniff *that* away. Is your daughter's happiness to be sacrificed because you quarrel with Sir Lipscombe about the game laws?"

It looked as if the allied powers were winning, and that the two fathers would go away without a victim, which would be a great pity and extremely provoking. Reginald, however, was there ready decorated for the altar, as he had been all his life. They were not going to depart without their prey. The most sensible plan would have been to renew their violent quarrel with one another, for which there were strong grounds ; but they were both, having quarrelled off and on for the last ten years without either having gained an inch, slightly afraid of one another. As neither of them cared about a fight, and as they must pitch into somebody, they renewed their attack on the perfectly inoffensive Reginald. They would listen to Goodge or Lord Arthur on any other subject in the world, in fact they listened to a great deal in the hall, when they were leaving, from both those

gentlemen. But one demanded, and the other backed him up in his demand, that the name of Mr. Reginald Hetherege was never mentioned to either of them again. The thing was done, and they would try to make the best of it. Both fathers agreed that it had been concerted in Mr. Hetherege's house, by his connivance and that of Miss Hickson. They repeated the request that their names might never be spoken in their hearing.

It was made obvious to the county that Reginald, Mary, Aunt Hester, Miss Hickson, and Miss Hickson's mother (who had some sympathy for having such a wicked daughter), had behaved most shamefully. Every one who loved Sir Lipscombe (nearly all the nicest people in the county) wondered what on earth could have induced him to take up with such strange people after what he had known of them in old times. The worthy

baronet in his anger let out the story about the execution in the house and the discovery of his son, and the greater part of the county would have nothing to do with them. The Duke and Duchess, as distinguished foreigners, and General Anders, as a man of great mark, were considered exceptions; but Reginald and the rest of his belongings got most emphatic cold shoulder.

He would really have been glad, as far as he was concerned, to have been left alone. But now that Sir Lipscombe Barnett had violently quarrelled with him, he naturally and at once became the dearest bosom friend of Lord and Lady Snizort. They never were out of the house now; the ghastly saw of one or other of their estimable voices was in the house every day. Lord Snizort insulted everybody about Reginald, and pleaded his cause with such persistency and long-

wordedness that Reginald's popularity became about as great as his own. Previously, when society was unaware what subject his lordship would choose for conversation, Lord Snizort had been a great nuisance. Now, when everybody knew that he was going to talk about Reginald's wrongs for an hour without leaving off, he was a greater one than ever. All his battles in Reginald's favour were reported in full by him and his lady at Hollingscroft; and Aunt Hester said at last, in confidence with Reginald and Mary, that if something did not happen to those two horrors, it would become a question between suicide and emigration.

In fact there seemed a fate against Reginald's being, in the common sense of the word, happy. But even Goodge did not pity him, for he said, " You may be sorry, vexed, disappointed, but your temper will always prevent you from

being really unhappy. You will be the happiest of us all, Reginald, when all is said and done. Still you are the most unfortunate man ever born. Why were you? You have always been told that it was a mistake."

CHAPTER III.

IN WHICH WE FOLLOW THE HEIR.

A SUDDEN though extremely natural change—a change for which we hope our readers have been wishing, from the extremely stormy sea on which Reginald found himself launched to the Pacific Ocean, may not be unacceptable. To the Pacific Ocean, however, we must undoubtedly go, having left matters in that quarter of Her Majesty's dominions to take care of themselves quite long enough.

Peace being within our walls, and prosperity within our palaces; Acre having been demolished, and the Pritchard affair settled, there was nothing very particular for Her Majesty's ships to do except to

cruise. This they did diligently: an exhibition of order and beauty at every port which they touched. None of our cruisers attracted more attention, or was received with greater applause than the frigate commanded by Captain Hickson, C.B. He occasionally got orders to go somewhere, and he went at once. The sweet little Admiralty cherub aloft giving him his orders, and he obeying them as a British sailor should. He kept his ship, his sailors, and his officers, in the most perfect state.

A question having arisen about the existence of some islands south of Campbell Islands, he got orders to go south and explore. He found the Macquarie Islands and the Emerald Islands, as he was bound to do. But finding nothing remarkable except ice in 62° south, he headed north again for New Zealand, to await fresh orders to do nothing with all

the diligence in his power, and the might of the British Empire at his back.

They had been now more than four months in that desolate southern sea—so little known then, so familiar now—when he turned his head northward. The weary blinding ice was still all around them, but the wind was fair, and civilization was not far. The crew and officers were in high spirits—there was a chance of shore at all events; and the midshipmen began discussing what they would have for dinner.

One morning, as the rising sun smote the highest crag of a neighbouring iceberg and made it shine like silver, a large ship appeared from behind it, and crossed their path. It was H. M. S. *Beacon*. A boat was alongside of her in a quarter of an hour. In an hour all the news had been interchanged, and was known all over the ship. The *Beacon*

had been sent to look for Captain Hickson's ship, and he had orders to proceed immediately to Sydney.

In two hours more she was away northward, with the *Beacon* far astern. Every wind from the bitter south seemed to follow and drive the good ship racing through the cold cruel sea. Even Hickson, not given to relenting into a joke, save with his best trusted officers, said that the hotel keepers in Pitt Street had got hold of the tow-rope.

Sydney! the sailors' paradise of those times, what extraordinary service had Hickson done to get such luck? Sydney was enjoyed ten times over before they were within five hundred miles of it. A few on board had seen it, but very few; they were for a time important personages. It was a most amazing place by all accounts, where the pigs were fed on peaches, and grapes and pomegranates

grew in the street. The mere word "Sydney" roused up the whole crew.

A likely and beautiful country when they sighted it one evening, with the setting sun blazing behind the forest-crowned peak of Cape Howe, and the ship was becalmed within five miles of land. The men got into the rigging to look at the land, of which so many of them had heard, and where so many of them were to lay their bones, when the weary tossing and tumbling at sea was over for ever. The approach to all the east coast of Australia is dull and solemn, though the first navigators were terrified at it, and said that it was possessed by devils. But it is a kindly looking coast for all that, and is tenderly loved by those who know the peace, silence, and beauty of the creek and river side beyond the mountain forests, which look a little forbidding to the mariner approaching from the south-east.

Two midshipmen were together by a gun, with their arms entwined, talking quietly together.

“A pretty country,” said the tallest of them. “When I quit the service I will come and see it in my yacht; it is not half examined yet.”

“When you quit the service!” said the other, “but you always said you would never do that.”

“I am getting sick of it. I might do better under another captain, but he is so cold and repulsive to me. I get the hardest work, even when it is not my turn. I get everything except one word of praise. I went overboard after that jolly, and held him up for twenty minutes: what did he say to me? He said, ‘You are very wet, sir, and had better get dry, for if you come on your watch with those clothes you will have the rheumatism.’ That is pretty encouragement.”

“I don’t think he likes you,” said the other midshipman. I would sooner go to sea with the devil than with my uncle.”

“Uncle! he is no relation of mine. I wish he was. I am head of a great family, and if he was my uncle he would treat me differently. But the strange thing is this: on shore he is the finest fellow you ever met. I came to sea partly because I—well, don’t laugh at me—adored him. And he treats me like this. It is too hard; I am sick of it all—utterly sick of it.”

There was a little more talk, during which the younger midshipman tried to comfort the elder. Then the captain’s steward was heard inquiring for Mr. Hetherege.

“Here he is,” said George, the taller midshipman, turning round. “Now, mark my words, Barton, this is to prevent my going ashore, as he did at Tahiti.”

George followed the steward into the

captain's cabin. Captain Hickson had got his lamp lighted and was writing. He pointed to a seat.

George Hetherage sat down, and the captain went on writing. At last he said, "I am writing home a letter to be posted at Sydney."

"I hope you will try to say the best of me, sir," said the lad, with a choking voice. "Before God I have tried to do my best, sir; I have indeed. I know you don't like me, but you need not tell them so. I thought that you liked me very much, and I came on board with you so full of hope. And I was so very fond of you, sir. I know I can't do right, but it is not for want of trying; I'll go on trying, if you will tell them at home that I am not an entire failure. Pray say that I tried, sir."

"There spoke your own grandfather," said Captain Hickson. "Reginald himself all over. Whatever goes wrong it is his

fault; he has no powers of self-assertion, no powers of self-defence, when he knows he is in the right. These Hethereges are born to go to the wall. Non-success for four generations has ingrained the habit of self-depreciation into their very blood. If you were to kick a Hetherege he would give you a terrible thrashing and humbly apologize for doing so afterwards. Come here, my boy."

George went to him, and the captain put his hand on his shoulder.

"I always had a strong personal feeling towards you. You come of one of the most perfectly amiable families which ever existed. But there is a terrible fault in that family, that of weak self-depreciation. Your ancestor, William, caused you to inherit a vast estate by his mere honesty and self assertion; since then the quality seems to have died out of the family. Your grandfather, in spite

of all his wealth, is a perfect tool in the hands of Goodge and Aunt Hester, both fortunately honest people. Of your father I say little, except that he was far weaker than your grandfather. I saw this quality, self-depreciation, existing in you, and I have tried to correct it. You know what friends we were on shore—who knows it better than you do? We have been strangers at sea, have we not?"

"Yes, sir."

"I wanted to try you. I was a little in hopes that you would have protested against my treatment of you; but you have done nothing of the kind. I only like you better for that. You are as God made you, a gentle biddable creature, incapable of a lie, incapable of a mean action; and yet, with that singular instinct of obedience, knowing so strangely how to command."

"To command, sir!"

“Aye. I have not a better officer in my ship. I am writing home to our people to tell them so. I am mentioning you to the Admiralty. Let the farce be done with, my boy, and let us be as we were on shore.”

George turned his face on his. “Are you my old friend again, as I knew you on shore.”

“Aye, every inch of it, and ten times more so. Never doubt it,” said Hickson.

“How could you have kept up the farce so cruelly and so long then? For nearly two years I have been in this misery. Would you not have broken your heart over it?”

“I am not a Hetherege,” said Hickson. “The Hicksons have temper; the Hethereges none. I have treated you very hardly, and possibly not wisely, my boy. It is all over between us now, and we are friendly for ever.”

The officers on the quarter-deck were rather surprised to see the despised midshipman, Hetherege, sitting and talking earnestly and affectionately with the captain that night. A junior officer ventilated the theory that the *Beacon* had brought news of Hetherege having come into his property. But that idea was scouted at once, because if one thing was more certain than another, it was that Hickson hated having a man independent of the service on board his ship. The theory of George's friend was much better, that the captain was forced at last to confess that the much-bullied Hetherege was one of the best officers of his years. That was the theory accepted, and Captain Hickson was rather surprised at the extraordinary geniality of his officers the next day. They were always most friendly, but as they were sliding along under the coast

they were more than that, they were genial. He attributed it to the approach to Sydney. But his first lieutenant told him the truth—that it was his new kindness to the most popular youngster in the ship was the cause.

He walked up and down the deck a few times, and then he came back to his first lieutenant, and said :

“Do you know, Lamb, our officers are a devilish good set of fellows.”

“That is their opinion about you,” said the lieutenant. “What made you try the boy so hard?”

“I wanted to see whether he was worth it,” said Captain Hickson. “Mind your own business. There is the Sydney head-light on the lee bow. Now for Sydney, old fellow.”

CHAPTER IV.

SYDNEY.

It is not to be supposed that the arrival of a man-of-war at the great port of Sydney creates half so much sensation in these days, when Sydney is one-fourth larger, and when the colonists have ships of their own, as it did in 1847. The arrival of such a fine ship was a great sensation; salutes were exchanged with the two other ships there, and the names of all the officers were published in the papers next morning.

Visits were at once interchanged with the other ships: and then the most hospitable of cities in the Pacific sur-

passed herself ; balls and picnics took place nearly every day, and both soldiers and civilians vied with one another in giving the blue jackets a most hearty welcome.

Crowds of new faces passed so very quickly over the eye that many were forgotten almost as soon as seen, and the whirl of new scenes and new amusements was so great that George was quite confused, and more than once made the mistake of calling people by their wrong names, which was amusing to the people, but a source of overwhelming confusion to the young gentleman himself, he being of an extremely modest and retiring disposition. But a week had not passed when he began to think that he saw one face oftener and in a greater variety of places than any other. At first he thought that it was fancy, but at last he was perfectly sure of it. An amiable-looking old man,

with a very full complexion and rather stout, certainly met him in a great many strange places, though he never addressed him. The old man was dressed in well-made clothes, such as a gentleman would wear, white trousers and waistcoat, and a maize-coloured coat, with an expensive Panama hat. Somehow, in spite of his good clothes and his heavy watchchain, George came to the conclusion that he was not a gentleman.

Yet he attracted his curiosity. He was in the theatre, in the bar-room, in the billiard-room, in the church, in Pitt Street, on the Quay, in the Domain, but never at any private house, or at any entertainment where the officers of George's ship were invited. He asked a few of his Sydney acquaintances who the old gentleman was, but none of them had noticed him or knew anything about him.

One morning riding, ten miles from

the town, he met him on a very beautiful horse, which he seemed unable to manage. He seemed so extremely disturbed and nervous that George, who was of an obliging disposition, and very much attached to the society of old people, proffered his assistance, which was at once thankfully accepted, and words for the first time passed between them.

“I am getting old, sir,” he said, in a very cheerful voice, “and my nerve is not quite what it was. I remember the time when I could have tried conclusions with this fellow, but that time is gone by.”

George held his horse while he dismounted, and then the old gentleman said that he would walk home. “It is only three miles,” he said, “and although I am lame I can manage it in time. I will cut a tea-stick at the next creek, and I daresay I shall get along.”

“Oh, I can’t hear of such a thing as that !” said the good-natured George. “You ride my horse—he is quiet enough—and I will ride yours. I am not a bit afraid of him.”

“No, really,” said the old gentleman, “from a perfect stranger I could not think—. You are too good.”

“Don’t mention it. Pray get on my horse at once, and I will soon manage yours.” They were mounted directly, and started along a side road amidst a profusion of thanks from the old gentleman. George found the horse to be the most docile and easy-tempered beast he had ever been on, the very thing for an old gentleman. He wondered at this, until he thought, “I suppose it is because the horse’s head is turned homewards.” He was surprised that he should not have seen this ; it of course never entered his head that the old gentleman had expressly

got up the whole scene for the purpose of making acquaintance with him, and had at last succeeded in doing what was very difficult for a man like himself, not known in Sydney society, to do—had got on speaking terms with an officer in the Royal Navy.

The road wound very pleasantly under over-arching trees, the sandy track being bounded on each side by fern and heath. Sometimes there was a pretty clearing, fenced with posts and rails, which were concealed by towering hedges of scarlet geranium, a wonder to George. Each wooden farm-house stood in a wildness of flowers, while the orchards consisted, not of apple and pear trees, but of peach and orange. The summer air was faint with scents of all kinds, partly European, certainly, but overwhelmed by the rich, aromatic smell of the bush, which in addition to scent, emitted sound in the

shape of large insects and the pleasant whistling of parrots, or rather parakeets. They came to a small town, with a little church and court-house, where the young men were playing at cricket ; then they came down to a pleasant river, bubbling over stones now, in the summer, but spanned with a noble wooden bridge thirty feet above its level, which was so built, George's companion told him, to provide against the winter floods. The old gentleman's conversation was very interesting and agreeable, and George liked him more and more. He knew more of the interior of the country and of the strange life and ways there than any of his aristocratic acquaintances in the town, some few of whom, at all events, had, George thought, the fault of being "genteel," a very sad fault, never committed by a gentleman. They rode on until at a smaller river they saw a charm-

ing little stone house in a nook among gently sloping heights, which came down to the stream. The wooden verandah surrounding it was nearly as large as the house itself, and had one *spécialité*, which took George's sailor-boy fancy immensely. On the roof of the verandah had been planted water-melons, which had rambled clean over the highest ridge of the house, covering it and hiding it from sight with a mass of broad leaves, yellow flowers, and enormous green fruit. He had never seen such a garden on the housetop before, and seldom such a garden as there was on the ground, covering the earth with gaudy masses of colour; and climbing up the pillars of the verandah, there were creepers of all kinds to mix with the water-melons on the roof.

“That is the house *I* should like to live in,” said George.

“It is at your disposal, sir,” said the old gentleman, “for it is mine. I am sure that you will not have come almost to the door without coming in.”

“I should very much like to see it. I should like to come in very much.”

“Will you do me the favour to eat an early dinner with me, and ride back to Sydney in the cool of the evening?”

“Well——” said George.

“I am delighted at your consent, sir; I do not know what there will be, for I was not expected back; I was to have had dinner in Sydney (this, singularly enough, was perfectly true), but I dare say my wife and her daughter Ada will make us comfortable. Here is my groom, who will take our horses. Will you walk in the garden while I go in and prepare them?”

George did so, and made friends with a colly dog; but his eye caught his host

after he had entered a room out of the verandah, and he distinctly saw him take down a picture, and move three or four books from the centre table. Then he had a look at his faultless boots and knee-breeches, and wondered if any one could possibly take him for a sailor; and felt extremely conceited, when he saw a very pretty girl indeed coming down the garden walk towards him. He at once shotted his guns and went into action; that is to say, into a grand flirtation.

The young lady gave him no trouble at all; she was not in the least degree “arch” or shy; she had no petty whims or tyrannies of any kind. She was very singularly well-dressed in her *dégagé* style, and she knew that also. She looked at George once, with one of those lazy southern looks out of her large dark eyes, which says at once, “Do come and make love to me to pass away the time, it is

too hot for anything else," and George immediately reciprocated, with a sailor's will for that sort of pastime, almost before she had time to lower the sleepy lids over those two liquid violet orbits which had for one moment met his own.

He had met with a delightful adventure, and he determined, boy-like, to follow it up. The old gentleman was rather a long time in seeing after domestic matters; but George was not in the slightest hurry. Once or twice there were distinct sounds of objurgation from a female voice in the house, and George set it down to a trifling difficulty with some of the convict servants. It was a pity, he thought, that such a lovely and charming young lady should ever be exposed to such sounds. It was a great pity, certainly, seeing that the foulest mouth in the whole kitchen was that of her own mother, the celebrated lady coiner.

Of course he never dreamt for an instant that he had got into very queer hands indeed. It never struck him that the old gentleman wished to gain his confidence, and that the girl was used for the purpose. Had he made the most diligent inquiries in Sydney about the old gentleman, he would not have heard a word to his disadvantage, further than this—he had married a successful convict woman. Had he told any of his new Sydney friends how he had passed the afternoon, they would have done nothing more than tell him that fellows older than himself were very careful not to get too thick with Miss Ada Honey, for her father notoriously wanted to marry the poor girl above her station, and would most certainly bring any man to book who gave him the chance. There was not one breath against the girl's character in any way; she was a very good girl, but would

most certainly marry the first gentleman who would ask her ; and she would have a very nice penny of money.

We are obliged to explain this, though George knew nothing of it, and after he had found this fairy bower hardly talked about the matter at all, thinking that he would keep a good thing to himself. He was only a boy of little more than seventeen, and was of a privileged age, when a lad may play fast and loose with any woman. Had he mentioned the matter at all, men a little older would have said that they would be glad to be in his place, but they dare not be.

We are keeping him standing in the garden rather long, however agreeably employed. After a time the lady-mother came out in full dress, a very fine woman, and extremely ladylike in her manner. George never from the first gave the old gentleman the credit of being a gentle-

man, but from the very first he thought that his wife was a thorough lady. Having been a first class lady's-maid for many years before the time of her transportation at about thirty-three, she was so ladylike as to take in a well-bred lad like George Hetherege.

The dinner was very good ; the mistress of the house had been still-room maid first, then kitchen maid, before her personal attractions had caused her to be moved to the position of lady's-maid ; so she not only knew what good eating and drinking was, but she knew how to produce it. George had certainly lighted on his legs.

The afternoon passed most agreeably, and he was pleased in every way. What with the agreeable company of the young lady and her saint-like mamma, the day slipped on so that he had to ride like mad into Sydney, to get on board his ship

in proper time. He tumbled into the last of his ship's boats in a great hurry, and next morning asked for five days' leave.

"I expect that we shall sail as soon as the *Torch* comes in," said Captain Hickson. "Where do you want to go?"

"A gentleman I have met in the bush, sir, tells me that he can show me some fine kangaroo hunting only forty miles south."

"Well, I have no objection," said Hickson. "Yes; you and your messmate may go if you like. I suppose you want leave for a messmate as well—put a name to him."

"The invitation only extends to myself, sir."

"Oh, indeed! A flirtation—and so Claridge is too good-looking to go with you, eh! She is very pretty, no doubt, and old enough to be your mother. The

service is going to the devil. Here is a boy of seventeen giving himself the airs of a man, and being jealous of a boy of fifteen. You can go, but mind, five days—and five only.”

George blushed and laughed, and went over the side, leaving the name of his new acquaintance with Captain Hickson. Captain Hickson took that address to the club that same afternoon, and inquired about it of an eminent police magistrate. The results were not satisfactory. The old gentleman, Mr. Clumber, had come from no one knew where, but was tolerably rich, and he had married a distinguished convict woman, long emancipated, who had been a leading dress-maker in Pitt Street. The girl was her daughter, not his. There was nothing whatever against the girl—in fact, everything in her favour. She had been well educated, and was very careful in her

conduct. If it were not for her mother, many ladies would take the girl up out of pity. The boy could get no harm there at all: if he wanted a spree in the bush he might go to fifty worse places. On the whole, the police magistrate thought that he, mere boy as he was, was much better there than knocking about in Sydney. Still it was not satisfactory, and Hickson was uneasy.

He would have been more so had he heard the conversation between Mr. and Mrs. Clumber after George's departure.

"What are you going to do now you have got him?" said Mrs. Clumber.

"I don't know," said Clumber.

"It is perfectly obvious," said Mrs. Clumber, "that it is not the slightest use attempting to get him to promise marriage to Ada. He is a mere child, though he looks like a man.

"He has fallen in love with her," said the husband.

“Yes,” said the worthy lady; “but as I tell you again, he is a child; and he must be on board ship in a week.”

“Suppose we stopped that. Suppose we got him away just too long, until he was afraid and ashamed to go back. Did you see that I asked him to get five days’ leave to come kangaroo hunting?”

“That was very clever, my dear love. You are the cleverest man I ever knew, and so clever as this, that you are not above taking the advice of a woman like myself, with half your brains. But even suppose that you forced him to miss his ship, what follows?”

“In a year and a half he would be old enough to marry her; and then things would be square.”

“After Reginald’s death,” said the lady. “He is not at all old as yet. Haven’t we cross-examined the cub this very afternoon? Don’t we know that

Reginald is good for eighty, and after that silly attempt by that ass Simpson, of which we heard underground, he is surrounded by gamekeepers. Just let me put the case before you, my dear old man, and listen patiently: at Reginald's death there will be a settlement, and this boy will be rich. Well and good; others will be rich with him—among others, Simpson and James Murdoch: at least, so say the lawyers, and so they believe. Supposing the boy to die, what then? Follow me. There would certainly be a settlement at Reginald's death; on which, according to the advice which Simpson and James Murdoch have, they will be ten times richer in case of the boy's death. The Hetherege line ends with this boy. Simpson tried to put Reginald out of the way once, as James Murdoch did once, to gain a settlement and bring

about a compromise with the family, who would never trouble either of them now, for very shame's sake. Let Reginald be for a time; your power gains tenfold by this boy's death."

"But, my dear——"

"But, your dear! What was your first plan: to attract the boy by throwing Ada in his way, and then follow him to England with her, keeping him to his bargain. It looked very well; but I thought that the boy was much older. Say that you had succeeded. We should have had her Mrs. Hetherege, the wife of the great heir. But it can't succeed; the boy is not old enough to let it succeed. Captain Hickson would find out enough here to blow upon me, and render it impossible. Do you see, old man, that it would *not do*?"

"I am afraid you are right, old girl," said the worthy Mr. Clumber. "I thought

that I had made it out all square—but a woman against the world.”

Mrs. Clumber kissed him. “Now listen to me all over again. If anything were to happen to this boy—I leave alone anything happening to Reginald—how do we stand? Why, our secret is worth ten times more to Simpson and James Murdoch than it was before. I would not take less than thirty thousand pounds for it.”

“No, my love; I don’t suppose that it would be worth less than that. Still, as it stands, it is worth a good deal, and, one way or another, I must go to England and see after it.”

“Where did you put it?” said the lady.

“Thank you, my dear, I would rather not tell you. I have seen you in that hysterical temper with the servants that you would let out anything; and I think,

on the whole, that you had better trust it to me."

He did not look at Mrs. Clumber's countenance, because he had no curiosity. He was perfectly aware that she looked at him as if she would like to murder him; it was an expression in which that lady so often indulged that he did not care, one way or another, to see it again.

"I will leave it to you, if you like," she said sweetly; "but if anything was to happen to you, you might be sorry not to have told me."

Mr. Clumber, having often thought over the extreme probability of something happening to him if he ever *did* part with the secret of his heart to the wife of his bosom, said only, "Will you further unveil your plans, my love; I am all attention?"

"You have got the boy, and find him only a boy, not fit for your plan. He has

got five days' absence. Make him overstay it; there is plenty of scrub to the south where you can trust him for days, for weeks, for months—for ever. Then, when the thing has blown over, go to London, sift what you know of, and make your bargain."

"Did it ever strike you, my love, that I might make a bargain with Reginald?"

"No; Reginald is too honest; you can't do anything with an honest man—no sensible being ever could."

"Or General Anders?" said Clumber.

"No; confound him, he is honest too. You must not try him."

"And did you propose, my dear, that I should put this youth out of the way by my own hand?"

"I do not go so far as that. I think that you have eaten the bread of his family so long, that it would not be respectable." Here she rose and swept

her silk skirt along the floor with the air of a Marquise Brinvilliers, or a lady much more familiar to us, the agreeable and charming Mrs. Manning. "I can manage all that part of the matter without troubling you."

"Then, if you did not mind, my dear, I think that I will leave it with you," said Mr. Clumber; and the lady departed.

CHAPTER V.

THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

GEORGE was back at Mr. Clumber's house soon after ten. He had left the ship by the first boat, with a hurried farewell to Captain Hickson, and a promise to be punctually back from his leave. He had some wild idea that he might want money, and so he put a bill for fifty pounds in his pocket: he was in such a hurry to see the house of the flowers and the agreeable young lady again that he cared for no breakfast, but trusted to getting it on shore. As the boat pushed off, he gave a look at the dear

old ship, in which he had learnt so much, and suffered not a little.

“The tall masts quivered as they lay afloat.”

He felt that he loved the old ship dearly; but more dearly than her, the man who stood upon her quarter-deck. The man who had done him the compliment of trying him so hardly, and who had done him the high honour of telling him that he had been more than worthy of his trial. The boy left the ship with his heart beating wild with new hopes, new thoughts and ambitions, all to be told to the beautiful girl who was his friend, before the sun was high. He was not a handsome fellow, but the bare-necked, bare-breasted sailors at the oars could not help but notice that the most popular youngster in the ship looked more gay and pleasant than ever.

The bank was open early in that hot

weather, and he got his bill cashed. Then he got his breakfast at the hotel, and ordered the horse which he had hired during the stay of the ship: for he was always in funds—the richest of his messmates. Then he dressed himself carefully in the best costume of the country, and rode away through the suburbs to his pleasant new acquaintances who lived among the flowers in the aromatic forest.

According to the rules of a certain kind of high art, he ought to have ridden over a black snake in the grass, as a warning not to go on. Aunt Hester, in her style of art, would most certainly have done so, and would either have made him turn back and be saved, or proceed to his destruction. We no more pretend to emulate Aunt Hester's genius than we do to emulate her virtues. We can only say that he saw no snake in

the grass, and that if he had he would certainly not have turned back for it.

When he arrived at Mr. Clumber's his young lady was on the lawn in a riding-habit. Her eyes were not so bright as they were the day before, and George, with the pleasant boldness of a sailor, asked her if she had been crying for his absence. She said no, but she seemed very much inclined to cry then; for she had heard enough of the conversation between her mother and stepfather on the afternoon before to make her very anxious, little as it was. And she had reason to cry, for, honest and good girl as she was, she knew more of the ways of this wicked world than George did; and George—God help her!—was the first gentleman she had ever met in her life, and she loved him.

Her stepfather came out, and George heard him say, "Go and tell your mother

he is come, and bid her see to breakfast." But Mrs. Clumber was ill, and did not appear. They had breakfast, and then they rode southward, followed by two grooms and one dog, a colly.

Ada was not herself by any means; beautiful she was, with that blazing Australian beauty which fades so soon, but her vivacity was gone this morning. The conversation was principally between Mr. Clumber and George for many miles.

The Blue Mountains on their right, they rode pleasantly on through forest and over plain, through a beautiful English-like country all the morning, and stayed at a settler's house at mid-day. It was as good a house as many which he had passed or had entered, but there was a *je ne sais quoi* about the people in it which puzzled him extremely. They were utterly different to the squatters he had met in Sydney; they were not

ladies and gentlemen, and were extremely constrained in their manners before him. They were dressed much the same as other people, but there were a hundred points of want of refinement which he noticed, and, as a general rule, they seemed very much surprised at his capture by Clumber, and rather afraid of him. The children, however, particularly the boys, came out in their true colours as the unmitigated little savages they were. George devoutly hoped that there would be no children at the next house they stayed at.

There were not, and the people were a slight improvement on the last, but by no means up to the Sydney mark. They slept here, and were to hunt the next day.

In the morning they started out into the delicious air, full of scent of flowers and song of birds, before the sun was up,

and when the east was in colour a primrose green. The dogs barked joyfully, and the horses neighed their pleasure ; it was impossible to resist the air and the beauty of all things round, and George gave loose to his spirits and became confidential to the strangers who surrounded him, numbering about seven or eight, and forgot the fact that they were a sad contrast to the real bush gentlemen he had met. If he had only known the fact, he was among one of the rowdiest set of blackguards in the colony. They talked with their grooms like equals on all kinds of subjects, and were by no means improving society.

Neither Mr. Clumber nor Ada went with them, the former pleading age and fatigue, and the latter, of course, her sex and weakness. The ground over which they began to ride was almost mountainous, deeply timbered, with open

valleys of exquisite beauty between the ridges. They had ridden scarcely a quarter of a mile when George saw something large in front of them moving slowly up and down: it was a large brown kangaroo. The next instant the dogs had seen him; the beast was off at full speed, and the sticks were flying about like mad. George forgot everything at once in the wild gallop which followed. The great creature, with infinite dexterity and speed, was going in a manner which would be thought impossible by those who have only seen them in a menagerie. Up hill and down hill were alike to them all now; a mile or two passed, some heavy in and out leaps were taken by George among the branches of giant trees fallen in the forest, but still the pretty animal steered ahead among the bushes and obstacles nearly in a straight line, as fast as ever; and still

close to George rode one of Clumber's grooms, whom he afterwards found out to be his head stockman, encouraging him and guiding him.

At the foot of a very steep hill, in a very secluded valley, the kangaroo went to soil in a water hole and was killed. The whole party were up at the death, and they at once, as the horses were fresh, agreed to hunt another; "And," said one of the young men, "let us turn him homeward, and we shall come in for lunch." Every one agreed to that as a very good idea." George took occasion quietly to thank the stockman for his advice and assistance, and, considering himself the guest of the party, thought it only proper to slip two sovereigns into the stockman's hand. In doing so he looked at him. He was a rough-looking fellow about thirty, but in spite of the strange, defiant, sulky look, which all

of the present company had, he did not seem to be entirely a bad fellow. He looked at the money and hesitated, then he looked rather earnestly into George's face, and seemed to deliberate, as if he was thinking of a very important matter. At last he seemed resolved, and put George's money in his pocket with an oath, and no other kind of recognition or thanks whatever.

George thought these strange manners, but he reflected that he was at the Antipodes, where everything is exactly the reverse of everything in Europe, consequently that it might possibly be the correct thing for a man to swear at you for giving him a couple of sovereigns. A diversion to his thoughts soon occurred, which made him think again that he was at the Antipodes: the determination of the whole party was to hunt the next kangaroo towards home: the instant

the animal was seen, however, the host's son most dexterously turned it in exactly the opposite direction to that of the way home. It was certainly the longest, for the kangaroo would have had to go round the world in the present cruise to take them one foot nearer the station. One or two of the party swore and turned back, but the others swore and went on; as they none of them seemed to do anything without swearing, this did not surprise George. He went off at a good pace after the dogs, with his friend, the stockman, keeping close to him. This was a harder run than the other, for the dogs were a little tired and the horses were getting so. One by one the party tailed off, only George and the stockman following the chase, which seemed very long; at last, as they got into a thick scrub, the kangaroo seemed likely to have by far the best of it, and the

stockman drew his bridle, causing George to do the same.

“It is bellows to mend, young master,” he said; “we had better follow in the trail of the dogs, for there is one I should not like to lose. Will you come on with me?”

George at once consented, and followed his companion through scrub denser than he had ever seen before, for several miles.

“I am glad you are with me,” said George, with no notion of danger; “for I should never be able to find my way back!”

“No, master,” said the stockman. “There’s me and about five others could get out of this here scrub alive. If I was to have your life and blood at this here minute, and pitch you in there, all the traps in Sydney side would never find your bones. You can’t see the sun, that’s

what beats you, and you goes rambling round and round till your tongue gets dry and swell, and then you goes mad and busts up; and then the eagle hawk has your flesh and the warragals picks your bones, that's nigh about the size of it. But I'll fetch you to a place of safety, and you shan't be harmed, because of them sovereigns what you gave me."

George rather wished that he would have shown an inclination to assist him without the sovereigns, but as that seemed to please him he said that he should be most happy to give him a couple more when they got home.

"No, no," said the man; "them first was given willing; I'll do all I can for you."

George began to get uneasy, he knew not why. The stockman was talking very strangely to him, and he could not make it out. He was utterly unarmed, and no

match for the man either in strength or courage. He had heard strange tales of bushrangers from his friends in Sydney, and some were out now. What if this man were one?

He might have made his mind perfectly easy on that score. The man, undiscovered, unconvicted, was one of the great go-betweens or "fences" among all the bushrangers in New South Wales, and probably might now and then do a little amateur business himself.

"Had we not better turn back?" said George.

"Burn me if I don't think we had," said the other, and he reversed his horse's head, passed George, and began apparently riding in the opposite direction. He was doing nothing of the kind, and had made a perfect semicircle in half a mile, carrying George further and further away from the station, with a view, it is very possible,

to "plant" him, or hide him away for his own purpose; but nothing was ever proved against the man, for accident upset all calculations, and no one ever knew the truth for some time after, except those principally concerned.

They passed through the scrub, and came into an open cheerful valley, down which ran a small creek, murmuring over iron-stone boulders, with here and there some lightwood on its banks, and here and there a blue gum. They rode down to cross it, George taking his line under an aged gum. Suddenly the stockman cried out "Mind!" and before George had time to attend, his horse gathered himself together and was clambering up the boulders on the other side, while George's chest was brought sharply against an overhanging bough which would not give way. George checked him suddenly, and he and the horse came clattering

down together on the cruel stones. The horse rolled partly over him and injured him, then got up and trotted away. George lay perfectly helpless, in agony of mind and body inconceivable, unable to move.

The stockman dismounted, and said, "Now you *have* done it, young master; who would have thought of this?" He took him up gently, and laid him on the grass close to the water, and gave him drink out of a flask he had. He propped up his head with the saddle which he took from George's horse, and then he carefully examined his body, giving him great pain. It was quite evident to a man who had been as often smashed as himself that the small bone of the right leg was broken, and he mentioned the fact. Then he coolly mounted his horse and rode away in a different direction to that by which he had come. George saw him go silently, and his heart misgave him.

“Come back and say one word more,” he cried aloud; “I will give you any money to save me.” But the man only looked back cunningly at him and rode away.

The poor boy lay in his agony until the sun was gilding the tops of the highest trees, and the swift twilight was settling down into darkness. He saw it all clearly now; the man had left him here to die, so that he might rob his body when he was dead. “I would have given him ten times the worth of my watch and chain, and rings, if he would have stayed by me; but he might have been to the station and back long ago. I am deserted, and must die alone.” Hour after hour of the night passed, and he saw that his short and happy life, with all its brilliant prospects, had come to an end.

“The captain will think that I have

broken my faith with him, and have disgraced the service. Night—I—how silent the forest is—how cold it grows—this must be death. Good-bye, grandfather—good-bye, Emily.—Oh, God! in mercy upon me make it short. Our Father——”

CHAPTER VI.

HOMEWARD BOUND.

THE stockman was at the station late in the afternoon, about three or four hours later than, with his knowledge of the bush, he need have been. He went into the kitchen and had his tea; the people of the house noticed his arrival very soon, and came out asking where he had last seen George.

He said that he had put him on his way home long before noon, but had gone himself further into the scrub after the dogs. He thought that the young gentleman would have been home hours ago. He supposed he must have got

bushed. He offered to go and look after him as soon as he had done his tea.

“Where did you part from him?” asked Mr. Clumber very anxiously.

“The other side of the first belt of scrub, among the ranges.

“You must have been out of your mind,” said one of the young men angrily, “to leave him there. Why, the chances are ten to one against his getting anywhere.”

It was certainly true. That scrubby range, nearly without water, was a very dangerous place for any man to get bushed in, leave alone a new chum, and a sailor boy. There was instant alarm, and the search was begun. The alarm was spread to Sydney that an officer was lost in the bush, and the whole resources of the colony were set to work to find him, but without the least result whatever. The governor was extremely

anxious from the very first, and said so plainly. "If he has got into that scrub on those mountains, we may not find his bones for a year," was his very first remark. The horse we may get; but unless the young gentleman is peculiarly guided by Providence, we shall never see him any more. Very few of the police like to venture into it. A few stockmen may know their way about it, but you will get very little assistance from them. It is the Arcadia of the bushrangers, and we cannot drive them out of it."

Everything was tried, however. The horse was found grazing in a township, fifty miles from the last place where poor George had been seen, without the saddle of course. No trace could be found of the poor lad, and one day Captain Hickson's ship was put in mourning, with flags half-mast high, and ropes

all loose, for the most popular among her midshipmen.

Orders came for her to sail, and farewells were made to the hospitable city in due form. The Sydney young ladies who had driven their Australian lovers wild with jealousy for a time, once more relented towards them. The ship sailed away homeward bound, and with her crew was at once forgotten. She, if remembered at all, was only remembered from the memory of the merry young officer who died in the bush.

Captain Hickson saw Australia a dim blue line on the horizon, and then he went into his cabin saying, "This will kill Reginald. What a noble boy he was!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE DARKNESS BEFORE THE STORM.

REGINALD had long allowed that Job was the most sensible person in the world, when he said that man was born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upwards. Everything went completely wrong with him in every way. He was rich, he had no anxiety about the future as far as he personally was concerned; but one vexation followed on another so very fast that he really wished himself poor again. He said to Aunt Hester and Mary that he was as badly served as the wicked uncle in the "Babes in the Wood."

"I told you how it would be," said

Goodge one evening ; “ you should have made yourself preternaturally disagreeable at first ; you have not, and, therefore, you are bullied and patronized by every one, high and low. You are getting down in the mouth. Why can’t you pluck up spirit and tell Snizort that he is a bump-tious ass.”

“ I don’t think that would do,” said Reginald.

“ Then write to Owthwaite’s bishop and complain of him for preaching against you every Sunday. He let those two candles of his burn on the altar last Sunday when there was light enough to thread a needle by. I will swear to that for you in the Court of Arches. Tell the bishop, that what with his Romanizing practices, and what with his denunciations of you, you cannot any longer worship in the church of your forefathers.”

“I don’t want any more quarrelling, there is quite enough as it is.”

“Of course there is. I have observed the same thing with nations. Everybody knows you won’t fight, and so everybody insults you. I wish I was squire here; I would make lively times for some of them.”

“What would you do?” said Reginald.

“I should begin by kicking Bevan,” said Goodge. “He is utterly alienating the General from us. I should have an expensive row with Owthwaite in the Arches, and you with your money could leave him a beggar for life. I should then have a turn at Barnett over that decision of his on the Bench about the woman picking up his own sticks. I should write to the Home Secretary about that without any warning. I should begin an action against Snizort for trespass in that business of Halfacre’s

four-acre. I should give every farmer on the estate notice that his lease would not be renewed; and I would find a case against the union which would cost them a few hundred pounds or so. Thus you would be usefully employed and happy. As it is, you are idle and miserable."

"And you, Goodge, the peacemaker, give me this advice," said Reginald.

"My dear fellow, I was once in Arabia and wanted to get home. I, therefore, seeing no other way of getting to Mocha, set four tribes by the ears, and got them to declare war against one another individually. When they had had enough fighting I called their attention to the fact that they were a parcel of fools, and offered to act as mediator. My services were accepted with acclamation, and the four sheiks brought me, with a large and enthusiastic escort, to the gates

of Mocha. There is nothing like a good row if you are bored."

"Your conduct was scarcely moral, old fellow, was it?"

"My dear Reginald, they had always been cutting one another's throats before I went among them, and they began doing it again the moment I left them, they will also continue to do it until they are annexed by Turkey. Surely I was not so very wrong to utilize their habitual pastime for my own ends. We won India so; you should set these people more by the ears. They would all quarrel furiously with one another if there was a little more mischief made; meanwhile, they are making a holy alliance against you, because you will not fight."

"Well, the boy must come home and fight them," said Reginald. "Goodge, I am too old for much of it. I have lived

a very hard uphill life, and I don't want any more quarrelling."

"You mean you have never had any of it," said Goodge.

"Well, I am ready to go when the boy is ready to take my place."

The friends which Reginald had of his own little circle had stuck bravely to him, with one solitary exception. Since Bevan had met General Anders, he had grown more and more cold to Reginald, and had shown him less and less confidence in monetary affairs. General Anders had also come less and less to Hollingscroft; his continued absence was attributed to his larger and ever-increasing speculations, into which Reginald had not entered; but, in truth, Reginald had spoken to him very seriously about some of the later ones, and General Anders had resented it.

There was no change among any of the

rest. Aunt Hester was quite as self-possessed as ever she was in her life, and quite as uncertain in her behaviour. Mary was the pleasant little person she had always been, and Mrs. Hickson only spoiled her daughter a little more than usual. All these women in a state of quiescence, in a state of prosperity, appeared quite commonplace. In fact, a woman who is always exhibiting the strong side of her character when she is not wanted to do so—a woman who makes opportunities for showing off, is more or less a considerable nuisance to her friends and family in proportion as she does it. These women worked in the garden, fed chickens, drove ponies, looked after the poor, and paid visits in the most humdrum fashion. They had their anxieties, for two they loved were at sea, and one, Reginald, seemed always troubled in his mind. But there was nothing startling

in their lives; they were a kind of Landwehr—went through their drill regularly, but had plenty of fight in them should they ever be called out.

Miss Emily Hickson was the flower of the family, and a flower who required a great deal of tending. She attached herself principally to the Duke and Duchess, who lived much in town in the old house at Bolton Row, where they had the company of General Anders almost continuously.

Among the rest of Reginald's troubles was a slight coldness between him and the Duke about money matters. Reginald had thought it necessary to say that he thought the General was, on some points, ill-advised, and the good-natured Duke had thought that Reginald was not the man to speak so about his old friend. But the tiff was a very slight one, though they were not exactly the same to one another for a little time afterwards.

The rancour of Sir Lipscombe Barnett and Mr. Owthwaite was never, it seemed, to be got over. Nothing which Goodge could say would induce either of them to believe that Reginald had not encouraged those two lovers. It was idle to point out that he could not possibly have done anything of the kind. The match had prevented George from making a splendid marriage, and so Sir Lipscombe's anger was easily understood; but it was not so easy to understand Mr. Owthwaite's anger. Reginald wrote to Mr. Morley to make the peace between them, and Mr. Morley tried, but without the smallest success. Morley wrote:—"Owthwaite has been desperately wounded in his secret point—his vanity. He is, with all his great virtues, a bully, and he believes, and will continue to believe, that you encouraged his daughter, who ought to have been his slave, in rebellion. He will forgive his

daughter long before he forgives you, the more particularly because he is under a great obligation to you. It is dangerous to confer a great obligation on a man who is always contemplating himself like Owthwaite. When I say contemplating himself, I do not wish it to be inferred that he is selfish—a more unselfish being, in the ordinary acceptation of the term, does not exist. But he is always thinking about himself, and watching how near a state of perfection he attains. A mind like that is sure to be subjected to long fits of vanity and harshness. I would never have given him the living myself—saint as he is—but you would not consult me.”

This was highly satisfactory as an analysis of character, but it did not make more pleasant the fact that Mr. Owthwaite set most of the labourers, and as many of the farmers as he could get to

listen to him, against Reginald. Nor was the continued hostility of Sir Lipscombe at all more agreeable, for he acted on the county, and took every occasion to thwart Reginald in every way. They had ceased speaking for some time, and Reginald noticed that Sir Lipscombe always left the Bench when he appeared. A worm will turn, and after this Reginald never missed a petty session; so that the county was entirely deprived of the magisterial assistance of Sir Lipscombe. Sir Lipscombe being pricked sheriff this year, had his married sister out of Gloucestershire, and gave a terrific ball in a marquee, to which every one in the county went except the Hollingscroft people. All the ladies whom they knew came and called on them immediately afterwards, and all and sundry of them were astonished beyond measure at not having met them there. Lady Dory was so particular in her cross-

examinations as to their non-appearance, that Aunt Hester cut her short by telling her that Sir Lipscombe had not had the impudence to ask any of them after his shameful treatment of Reginald, and that if he had he would have had his card returned: which did a great deal of good.

Minor troubles were in abundance also, which we must come to before we mention the great and crowning trouble of all. Reginald, with his financial theories brought into practice, found that he must be a much harder landlord than the late landlord, Sir James Jones. Widow Austin and her son were not the worst farmers now on the estate, but better than the average. In spite of his yielding the ground-game to the farmers, the labourers were no better paid than they were before; and there seemed no chance of their ever being so. He helped some labourers to migrate to other parts of England, and

some to the Colonies and the States ; he infuriated the farmers by this, and unluckily his labourers were of the cowardly, helpless class which are never successful here or elsewhere. Emigration commissioners and Mr. Arch will find out, some day or another, that it is not much use, as regards present results, to draft off the least helpful of the labourers into lands where ten times more self-help is required than is required here. These unsuccessful labourers wrote back such dismal accounts of the Colonies and the States to their friends, that Reginald was looked upon as a swindler by the labouring population generally.*

Of all the people to rise out of the past and plague him, who should turn up but Monseigneur Morton. That worthy and good old man came to stay at the

* This was written many months before the lock-out. As it merely is the experience of thirty years it is of no value.

great castle near, where Giant Pope dwelt, and he came to see Reginald, who received him with open arms. He repaid his hospitality finely. He discovered the grave of a Saxon saint (a black letter saint with us) close to the north aisle of the church, beside a holy well. What does he do on his return to the Castle but turn out all the sacred things necessary from the chapel, and institute a pilgrimage to the shrine of this saint, with a large portion of the Catholic tenantry, in broad daylight. They came with vestments, banners, incense, and holy water, and, having defiled slowly past Owthwaite's study window, they drew up slap in the middle of his own churchyard, chanting and swinging censers. Since the Gunpowder Plot no such popish atrocity had been committed. Owthwaite was a High Churchman, and so his kind friends thought that it was done with his

connivance and consent, whereas he was a furious Anti-papist, and was nearly foaming at the mouth about the whole thing. Reginald asked the pilgrims to take refreshment in his house, which they readily did, just giving time for the villagers to assemble and hunt them out of the place with turnips and with bad language.

Mrs. Davies also, who had been kept on as housekeeper, turned sadly ungrateful, telling everything she knew to Reginald's disadvantage when he lived at Brixton.

He thought it would have been a very innocent, nay, possibly, useful thing, to keep a yacht at Haddensmouth, but that turned out quite unsuccessful. He never sailed in it, and, now that he had quarrelled with everybody, or rather, when everybody had quarrelled with him (except Lord Snizort), nobody else sailed in it. It was a floating source of demorali-

zation, and a public scandal, like everything else which this unfortunate man undertook. Details are, of course, impossible here, but something disagreeable happened connected with Reginald's yacht, and he was spoken to on the Bench about it. Even his defiantly fast friend, Lord Snizort, who never left him, told him that Haddonsmouth had been pretty bad before he came, but was considerably worse now.

CHAPTER VIII.

A SMALL FAMILY DISCUSSION.

THESE things all of them made him miserable, but the great misery of all has to be told. General Anders was in, high and low, with Theodorides and Bevan. Bevan especially seemed to have taken entire possession of him, and General Anders appeared to be like wax in his hands. Even Theodorides, possibly for reasons of his own, said a few words about Bevan which alarmed Reginald. Reginald went to town to speak to the Simpson of that day, and ask his advice.

The Simpson of that day and the Murdoch of that day were both young

men, one of them actually under thirty, and the other very little over that age. They heard of Reginald's coming, and they happened to be together. As he came in they looked curiously at one another.

The Simpsons and the Murdochs were doing very little business with Anders and Hetherege just now. Their fathers had both retired into a state of sleeping partnership in the country before the arrival of Count Theodorides and Bevan. The immediate fathers of these two young gentlemen had had enough of business, and only obliged from a distance. Had they been personally much in London, they might have known more. The advice they gave, however, was excellent enough according to their light, and the burden of it was, have nothing more to do with General Anders, save in the way of friendship.

The two young fellows, Murdoch and Simpson, were very fine manly young English gentlemen, and liked Reginald very much. They would do anything in the way of kindness for him; even had he been poor, would have done more for him than the family in old times had ever done. But they were extremely shrewd, and their parents had told them to be cautious. They had married sisters, and the sisters had permitted them to be fast friends, which is not always the case in this wicked world. So the each was in full confidence of the other, and knew what the other would say.

“I am glad to find you both here,” said Reginald, “for I wished to speak to both of you.”

“And,” said Simpson, “as we have only one voice between us, that voice says, we both wanted to speak to Cousin Reginald very particularly, and we both

wish Cousin Reginald well, for we are under obligations to him, and we are anxious to repay them."

"By warning me?" said Reginald.

"Exactly," said Murdoch.

"I think that I am pretty well warned," said Reginald smiling; "but I want some information."

"Quite so," said Simpson. "Suppose that we told you that *we* wanted some information, and were going to ask you for it."

"I will tell you all I know, save on one subject."

"And we know what that subject is," said Murdoch. "A shut-up room and a dead secret, eh, cousin?"

"No, I don't mean that folly," said Reginald. "I simply don't care anything at all about that. I don't fancy there is much there, except matters which had better be left alone. I don't indeed."

They were both evidently puzzled and disappointed, and they showed it.

“Will there be no end to this silly lawsuit then, cousin?”

“At my death, of course, there will be a compromise of some kind. But I did not come here to speak of that. I want to ask you, firstly, what do you know of Bevan?”

“Nothing. But, to be frank, we know enough to make us withdraw from any business transactions with General Anders as long as he has his ear.”

“Who was he?” said Reginald.

“If he was a certified convict from Sydney we should not so much care; but he cannot be traced. He came out of Mexico, and we know no more of him. Speaking, as being strictly in the bosom of the family, we think him a scoundrel; in the same way as we think General Anders mad. We have withdrawn from

all connection with the latter gentleman, as we said before ; but we shall be happy to remain in business connections with you, Reginald, for you are safe—you have realised. There is no business connection between you and Anders—no partnership ? ”

“ There never was and there never will be,” said Reginald, looking quietly at them. “ We have speculated heavily together, very often dividing the risks. The frank truth about the matter is that when we were better friends he told me that he was getting old and tired of it, and asked me to realise, so that we might have something safe in our old age. I have done so. I have not a sixpence in common with him now. If he goes wrong to a certain extent, he can come and share with me. If he goes wrong beyond a certain extent, why then he ruins me with him. That is what makes me so anxious.”

“We don’t see how he can ruin you,” said Murdoch. “What you have—some £200,000—is all your own. There is no ghost of a pretence of partnership between you. And he was very clever in persuading you to realise.”

“Yes; but if he went wrong I should have to give up every penny to put him right, don’t you see?”

“That is nonsense,” said they.

“But it is common sense—it is common honour,” said Reginald. “He put me in the way of making my fortune, and because he is misguided, am I to see him go to his grave a bankrupt in order to keep a few comforts round me. Nonsense again, my dear young cousins. Anders would die of a broken heart if he could not pay everybody; and I consider my realised estate as much his as it is my own.”

“You are as mad as General Anders cousin,” said Murdoch.

“No ; not so mad,” said Reginald. “There are matters of which you know nothing at all. There are matters of old standing which it would be difficult to make you understand. Do you know who General Anders is? Do you know who the father of General Anders was?”

“No.”

“Ha! then you cannot understand matters. My grandfather, William Hetheridge, did a great kindness to General Anders, when my grandfather thought that he wanted help. He never did want help, but he has repaid that kindness ten times over, not merely in putting me in the way of making money, but in pecuniary assistance long ago. It is a matter of absolute certainty, that if Anders were to go all I possess must go after him, and I must begin the world again.”

“After so many years, Cousin Reginald?”

“After so many years. I put it to both of you: could I leave Anders in the lurch after what he has done for me?”

“Would it not be better to share what you have with *him*, if anything happened, than to share it with his creditors?”

“You don’t know Anders. He would die by his own hand if every one was not paid,” said Reginald.

“You are singularly obtuse, Cousin Reginald. Is his honour so fine that he would ruin you to save his own reputation before the world?”

“I know my duty,” said Reginald, “and I shall do it. He will never be consulted.”

The cousins looked at one another, and then one said, with the evident approval of the other,—

“But the boy George, Cousin Reginald, have you considered him? We thought

that one of your main objects in realising was for his sake ; you must think of him. You spoke once about a pleasant, happy home for him when he left the sea. Have you given that idea up ? Should things go wrong in any way, would you deprive him of Hollingscroft and all its healthy, peaceful pleasures ? ”

“ I wish,” said Reginald solemnly, “ that Hollingscroft had originally belonged to the merchant Digby, that he had left it, as he originally did the whole of his property, to the devil, and that the will had never been disputed.”

“ Are not you happy there, cousin ? ” said young Simpson.

“ No, I am *not*,” said Reginald ; “ and I would sooner that that boy of mine stayed in his profession until my death, than that he should undertake the management of the place. Let him learn the management of a ship ; he may do *that*.

He can lash a man up and give him two dozen for looking saucy, and no questions asked. What would be said in Parliament if I fixed up the rector and gave *him* two dozen, as I should dearly like to do. Fancy old Snizort under the cat-o'-nine-tails; how I should laugh. No; let the boy stay at sea, if everything goes wrong, until my death. It is a weary life without him, but the sea will make a man of him."

"Yet you must be anxious about him sometimes," said Simpson.

"For all those that travel by land or by sea," replied Reginald. "Yes; when it blows hard I am anxious; but I know that he is safe. This is not business, however. If Anders goes to the bad, I go with him, that is to be understood—the chances are equal that he will not. Help me to prevent it, if you can. What do you know about Theodorides?"

“Why, nothing. He claims kinship with us on the wrong side of the blanket, but we know nothing of him. Twice some of our American cousins have been over here, and he has always avoided them. You see, Cousin Reginald, that now you are out of General Anders’s confidence, we really know very little more than you do. If you have made this resolution to share with the General, we can only say that we think you very foolish, and the possibilities are that you will die head clerk in our house with a salary of £600 a year.”

CHAPTER IX.

THE NEWS COMES HOME.

MISS EMILY HICKSON not being "out" found time in London extremely dull with the Duke and Duchess. She signified her royal intention of removing to Hollingscroft to see her mother. Neither the Duke nor the Duchess offering any strong objections, she went there. No one was in very good humour at Hollingscroft, and she found the place rather duller than London. She considered herself spitefully used by the general arrangements of Providence, and she mentioned the fact to Goodge.

"What is the good of being in Bolton

Row?" she said. "There's grandma always dressed up and going out, and there's the Duke always dressed up and going out. What is there for *me* to do? I am a mere dolly of a school girl—not even that; I wish I was, for I could plague the governess. Then I came here — everything seems wrong here; there is no society, no one comes. I dress and look my best, but there is no one to look at me; and the people seem all to have lost their tempers. I think I shall lose mine."

"I would not do that," said Goodge.

"Why not?"

"Our friends are getting old, and you should not be frivolous and silly, but should be like a sunbeam in the house, enlivening them. Child, the time may come when you will look back to these present days as the happiest in your life. Every one has spoilt you; be careful that

you do not spoil yourself. Think of others more, my child."

Emily looked at him thoughtfully.

"I do not say that you are selfish; I only say that you are thoughtless. Try not to be so. What should you do if sorrow and trouble fell on these good people, who have been more than friends to you?"

The girl began to grow red. She answered,—

"I would give up all my life to help any one of them, or be a comfort to them in any way I could."

"Are you a comfort to them now?"

The girl was silent. At last she said,—

"You mean that I am more plague than profit?"

"Exactly what I do mean," said Goodge; "and I am very glad that you see the matter as I do. You have an idea that if there was trouble in the

house you would at once become the angel in it. You should practise the *rôle* a little more. Your ways are very pretty and your impertinences are amusing, but they are quite out of place here and now. You discount the love which people bear to you by continually drawing on it. You are worthy of better things than being a doll and puppet, and you are getting to be a very troublesome doll. I can assure you that unless you take up the present tone of the house more than you seem inclined to do at present, you will by no means add to its comfort by your vivacity." And Goodge left her standing there, and departed in an extremely ill humour for his walk.

"There," he said to himself as he started, "I think that I have given that young lady a piece of my mind. I cannot always keep my temper with her. She has got herself surrounded so with a

circle of self that she has become an intolerable nuisance. There is bother enough without her."

Going through the farmyard he met Reginald. "I am going for the letters," he said; "will you walk with me?" but Reginald said "No." He was looking after his farm. Reginald saw the gaunt figure, in a pith helmet, go striding across the park among the deer, and thought very little about it then. Still, that figure brushing through the fern, under the overhanging oak boughs, from light to shadow, from shadow to light, never left his eye on this side of the grave.

He was in his justice-room—his study, when Goodge came back; he looked up cheerfully. Goodge looked very pale. Reginald was writing, and he put down his pen.

"What is the matter, Goodge?" he said very slowly.

“Reginald, the very worst conceivable.”

“Is Anders dead?”

“No; nothing of the kind; far otherwise.”

“Is any one else dead?”

“Yes.”

“Hickson?”

“No. Some one else.”

“You are not going to tell me the disaster which I see in your eyes. Goodge, have mercy upon me. After so many years’ friendship, don’t be my murderer.”

But Goodge buried his face in his hands and was silent.

“This simplifies matters,” said Reginald. “I can go to him now; I am coming to you, George. My darling, I am coming!”

Goodge rose and put his hand on his shoulder. “Reginald, do you think

that God would let you meet our boy in heaven if you came before His judgment throne with the bloody hand of a suicide."

"I was not thinking of that, I tell you truly," said Reginald. "I should have done that long ago, if I had ever intended to do it at all. I am, as you see, perfectly coherent and calm. I have borne so very much, Goodge, *that I think I could bear anything now except joy.* Am I never to see my darling again, then?"

"Never!"

"God's will be done; but He has been hard upon me. I was sorry for adversity because of others, for I never cared much for myself. I was glad of prosperity, and rejoiced in it, until God turned it into ashes in my mouth. It is all over now, Goodge. God must give me rest soon. Will you tell me how it happened?"

“I have a letter from Hickson, telling all about it; there is another for you, no doubt containing the same intelligence. The boy was lost in the bush, kangaroo hunting, and has perished.”

“Alone?”

“Yes; all alone, poor fellow.”

“Goodge, you have been near to it yourself. Do they suffer much?”

“No. Oh, dear, no,” said Goodge, choking with emotion. “They get delirious, as I did myself, and they know no more. They die as easily as you would in your bed.”

“Hush! he was a pretty boy—at least, in my eyes. Was he much disfigured when they found him? Where is he buried?”

“Reginald, do face facts once and for all: he perished in the bush, and his body has never been found—almost certainly never will be.”

Reginald looked full at Goodge; he looked ten years older than he did when the conversation began, but he was perfectly firm and self-possessed. He opened Hickson's letter and read it carefully through; he made no comment on it at first, but after a time he said, "There is no proof that the boy is dead at all."

"He is, however," said Goodge. "Don't be insane enough to buoy yourself up with such foolish hopes. The poor lad is dead, and we must break it to the women."

"True. I did not think of that. I thought only of myself. You think, on your soul, Goodge, that there is no hope?"

"My dear Reginald, cannot you understand that the boy is dead, and that you never will see him any more?"

"Yes; I suppose I shall realise it soon. You had better tell Hester; I

will tell Mary. We have been through so much together, that I think it would come better from me."

He went to the drawing-room, where Mary was sitting with Aunt Hester, and asked her to come with him into his own room. Goodge heard the door close behind them, and in a few minutes poor Mary, who had suffered so long and so patiently, was sending shriek after shriek ringing through that happy home which Reginald had secured for himself and for her in their quiet old age. The last hope for which they lived was gone from them, but those two remained—a broken-down old man and a desolate-hearted widow.

"Let me go to her," said Aunt Hester rising. "What is the matter, Goodge?"

"George is dead," said Goodge; "and he has broken it to her. Leave them alone together, I tell you. Don't disturb

such grief, as you live: let them be—let them be!”

In the horror, the tears, the confusion which followed, one person was quite unnoticed. The poor little, tiny Emily, whom they had petted, spoilt, and played with so long, seemed to feel it less than any of them. Perfectly dry-eyed, she was about among them all, pervading the house, and doing kind little services for every one. No one seemed to notice her coming and going, yet one man had his eyes on her with regret and distress, for he had been unkind to her that morning, and he saw how humble and penitent she was. “Before God I will never speak harshly to a woman again,” thought Goodge. Late in the afternoon, when Mary was quiet on her bed, and Reginald had seen them for one instant to tell them so, a circumstance occurred which made Goodge firmer in his resolution. Aunt

Hester, Mrs. Hickson, and he were sitting quietly talking in the drawing-room, where the blinds were drawn down, when the poor little maid Emily appeared with a tray and three cups of tea upon it. She had made it for them herself, she said, and was afraid that it was very bad, because she had never made tea before ; but she hoped that they would drink it, and try to forgive her for any trouble she had caused them in old times ; “ they are gone by for ever now,” she said, and in trying to say more threw herself on her mother’s bosom, and lifted up her voice and wept, refusing to be comforted.

CHAPTER X.

A PROMISING ROMANCE COMES TO AN END.

Mrs. CLUMBER had an entirely thorough-going way of doing business, which, as we have said before, reminded us of the late lamented Mrs. Manning. Her husband, on the other hand, had less genius than his wife in that particular direction. Mrs. Clumber's plan was simply this:—

Her husband had a very valuable secret—or, at all events, had told her that he had—about the Digby will case. Her woman's intellect told her that the secret was worth £30,000 to Messrs. Theodorides and Bevan, and that the best thing to do was to clear every one out of the way who stood between her and a good bar-

gain. Clumber, on the other hand, was of opinion that the more parties left to bargain with, the greater was the chance of a good arrangement.

Matters were tolerably understood between the worthy couple on the morning of the kangaroo hunt. Clumber had entirely fallen into his wife's plan, and praised her for her sagacity, with every intention in the world of entirely thwarting her, by merely delaying George until his ship was sailed, and then think what he would do next. Like all irresolute men he hated words, and so he saw his wife closeted with the stockman before-mentioned without exhibiting the least symptom of interfering.

Had George been done with as Mrs. Clumber directed, we should have seen nothing more of him. A hint in certain quarters that a young gentleman was bushed in that scrub, accompanied with

the extra information that he had a gold watch and chain and two diamond rings, would have been quite enough to prevent his returning home any more, without the slight refresher of a couple of ten-pound notes. Most likely no understanding in words was ever come to between Mrs. Clumber and the stockman, but she made him understand her perfectly well. The stockman incidentally came to her husband for the two ten-pound notes, and so saved him the trouble of asking any impertinent questions. Clumber knew that she had given them to the stockman for necessary expenses. He merely doubled the sum on the condition of safely "planting" the young gentleman with certain friends of his until the ship was gone. That was the stockman's intention when the lamentable accident happened which put him out of his reckoning. He was most terribly afraid that he had unwittingly

tingly obeyed his mistress's orders instead of his master's, and that the boy would die. They were ten miles short of the place where George would have been cooped up long enough to serve Clumber's vague purposes. The boy had gained on the stockman's rude nature by his frankness, and he was bitterly sorry that he had ever had anything to do with the matter. Having left the boy, he rode away into the mountains as fast as his horse would carry him, vowing never to have his hand in such a business again.

It was very late, as we said, when he got back to the station, and Clumber was a little time before he could get him alone without suspicion. At last they were together, and Clumber asked,

“Is it all right?”

“It is as right as I have been able to make it. He came to terrible grief: his horse came down. I went away like mad

for assistance as soon as I had made him comfortable. I found Jim at home, and he said he would be with him soon after nightfall. He won't be able to move for three weeks, but they will take good care of him. Jim is as good as a doctor. You need not fret yourself about him in any way, I think. I will be away again soon, and let you know how he gets on."

"Do, like a good soul. I will pay you well if he lives. Not one word to the missis."

"In course not. You had better smuggle some brandy away, for I doubt Jim has got nothing but whiskey. I'll take it to him."

"Where will he be?" said Clumber.

The stockman looked at Clumber, and deliberately shut up one eye. That inquiry was no use, and Clumber laughed at his simplicity in asking it.

"How soon will you be back?" asked Clumber, going on another tack.

“Four hours,” was the incautious answer.

“I know where he is now then,” said Clumber. “He is safe enough there. I will get you a bottle of wine and a bottle of brandy ; but mind he does not see you.”

The man came into Clumber’s bedroom out of the verandah about two o’clock, and found him snoring heavily. He got hold of one of his hands, and squeezed it gently. The snoring ceased, but the old man did not move or speak ; he knew that old convict signal well enough.

“He is right enough,” said the stockman. “They have got him to bed and to sleep. They couldn’t get him the length of the place you know of—it was too far. They’ve got him in an old mimi, not a mile from where he fell down, and the deuce won’t find him there.”

“How far did you get him before it happened, then?” whispered the old man.

“The upper end of Damper Creek,” was the answer.

“He is safe enough in the scrub round there,” Clumber replied; and so they parted.

In the morning, of course, the search was renewed, and the alarm given in Sydney. Miss Ada rode away to tell her mother, but she never arrived at home; in fact, she had no intention of doing so. She was perfectly well accustomed to ride about by herself, and was prepared to do so this very morning—in fact, was standing before her horse in the verandah when one of the young ladies of the house came out, and created some confusion by saying,—

“Law, Ada dear! however will you ride with that skirt under your habit; you’ll be so uncomfortable!”

But the young lady said that she wanted to take it home, and, looking as if she wished her friend at a considerable distance, rode away, and disappeared down the road among the trees.

She had been listening at her father's window the night before. Anxious beyond all measure at what she had heard previously, she had never undressed herself, and at last heard in the middle of the night the sound of a horse's feet approaching. Then she heard the rails go down and go up again; and then she heard the horse neigh as he was sent loose in the paddock; then she heard the steps of a man coming cautiously through the garden towards her father's window.

She heard as much as she wished to hear. She knew the creek at the point where it came into the main river, and she determined to follow it up. Armed

with her knife, and a skirt on under her riding-habit, she found herself at the junction of the creek and the river by twelve o'clock in the morning. She at once begun forcing her way up it.

At first there were cattle tracks through the thick tea-scrub, and she got on pretty well; but her difficulties increased the further she went, until she came to a dense mass of fallen timber and thick Eucalyptus scrub, beyond which neither cattle or horse seemed to have passed. She was an hour getting through, not without a little hard work with her knife, and sometimes, poor thing, sitting down to refresh herself with a good cry. But once past the barrier, the valley of the creek opened out into ground where it was possible to ride. It was an impregnable native fastness; but she was determined to do what she had in hand.

It was three o'clock before, peering

about her, she came in an open glade on the signs of the accident. The boy was only a short distance from here ; she at once began to sing, and to stop between every verse.

Her ruse was successful : she was reconnoitered. Had she been a policeman she would have been welcomed with a shot ; as a solitary woman she was allowed an interview. An evil-looking old man, coming from a direction contrary to the real one, showed himself. She at once took possession of him in an imperial manner.

“ Oh, here you are. Look here, my father has sent me to nurse the young officer who is planted here. We did not mean him to get hurt ; his life is fearfully valuable to us. If you don't mind what you are about with him, we will make this crib too warm for you. Is Jim here ? ”

He had been listening to every word. "You are a plucky young lady, Miss Honey," said the bushranger, whom some said was worthy of better things. "You are safe and welcome."

"I mean to make myself both," said the young lady, showing her knife. "Where is he?"

"We have made him as comfortable as we can; here he is, and my wife with him."

The poor boy was undoubtedly very ill, without fever sufficient to induce actual delirium, but quite sufficient to make him perfectly careless about surrounding objects. During the day they got more and more bark, and made a really nice hut with a bed-place for him; he was as comfortable as circumstances would permit; and the bushranger's wife and Ada were kind nurses to him.

It was after the second visit of the

stockman that he discovered where Ada was, and he told her father. He was not sorry that she should be there, for a new scheme at once entered into his irresolute brain: suppose the boy *should* retain sufficient gratitude for him to marry her when he was old enough. The Lord Chancellor might object, but that might be got over.

Three weeks they kept him there before he really could move at all; and it was ten days more before Ada, who had left him and returned many times now, took him for a short walk alone, and, kneeling before him, told him her tale.

He was among the bushrangers, and they would try to make an immense demand for his ransom, or kill him. She had accidentally found out what had befallen him from an old servant; and so on, with an endless rigmarole, part of which she had previously concocted, and

part of which she made up on the spot. She pointed out to him that if he betrayed her, she was lost. He promised not to betray her, and they exchanged their only kiss. She had so contrived that they could escape, and she and the stockman got him romantically to the station from which he had started, and from thence back to her father's, where he first learnt that his ship had sailed.

His story was considered extremely romantic and queer, but his injuries were undoubtedly real, and not much inquiry was made about the matter. The captain of the *Doris* stared considerably; but on the whole thought that George had better go home in the next ship and explain himself to his captain, remarking that it was no business of his to express an opinion one way or another.

Clumber knew perfectly well that should the truth ever be known about his action

in this foolish matter to his wife, he would not be particularly comfortable in her hands. He was so perfectly satisfied on this point, that he got her to agree to his going to England, and taking her daughter with him. This arrangement had been agreed upon before the reappearance of George before an astonished and somewhat scandalized Sydney.

CHAPTER XI.

TWO OLD FRIENDS COME TOGETHER AGAIN.

It was a foolish plot carried out with a feeble and hesitating hand on the part of Clumber. It led, however, to singularly unfortunate and disastrous results at home. For six weeks Reginald believed George to be dead, and so just at the time when he should have kept his wits about him most, he was simply carelessly desperate, without a solitary aim in life.

He told Goodge that his head was going, and laid before him a little plan of which Goodge, after a deal of questioning, consented. It was only the executing of a deed of gift for £30,000 to Mary.

This he had done at once ; he then let affairs take their course, and appeared to be totally unconcerned about anything.

He was not morose, but he declined to see any one except his family. When the news of the disaster came, his enemies relented at once, and would have been very kind, but he would see no one at all. Mr. Owthwaite and Sir Lipscombe had made mutually the wonderful discovery that the runaway match was not such a disaster after all, and that Reginald was not in any way to blame about it. They wrote a joint note asking to see him, but he returned an evasive answer. Every one was extremely kind to him now ; but he did not want kindness, he wanted peace, and he was likely to get none at all.

The supposed death of this boy caused very singular complications in the great lawsuit which had been waiting on Reginald's death. The Simpsons, Murdochs,

and Talbots began to arouse themselves about it, after many years, and Reginald for the first time heard the word "compromise" from young Murdoch, within a fortnight of the news of the boy's death. It passed in at one ear and out at the other; he thought nothing more about the matter. Murdoch and Simpson did, however, and the Digby will case began to grow silently a very lively thing indeed, from this failure of heirs under the Hetheridge branch of the family.

Goodge was called into consultation with Murdoch and Simpson, and left them with a rather brightened face, but he said nothing to Reginald, because at least a year would have to pass before anything could be done in the way of a compromise, and they, at that time of speaking, could not say one word about any offer. Simpson thought that if two deaths could be proved, they might give

Reginald ten thousand a year for his life, but Murdoch laughed at this, and said that no one knew what money was left.

Said Goodge, "Which two lives do you speak of?"

"Those of James Murdoch and George Simpson. You will think it absurd, but we have no proofs of their death. I don't see how we can move without them."

"I don't believe they *are* dead," said Goodge. "Are you quite sure that Theodorides is not your *uncle* Simpson?"

"No, we are sure of *that*," said Simpson. "What we are not so sure about is ——. Well, never mind. See if you can rouse old Reginald about the matter. It will do him good."

This happened only in the third week of the mourning time, other things meanwhile had happened of which they knew nothing.

After the first news of George's death, General Anders had come at once to Hollingscroft, had come into Reginald's study, and had sat down beside him quickly, with his arm on his shoulder.

They talked long together. Not a cloud was between them in any way now. They were only two old men whose lives were drawing to a close, and who called up pleasant old memories from the past. Anders was his own, old self again in the presence of his friend's great affliction; not one word of business was spoken of between them, when General Anders rose to ring for his fly.

"You won't stay to-night then?" said Reginald. "They would all like to see you so much."

"I! No," said the General. "My dear fellow, I am up to the eyes in business. I have no time now; I am busy night and day. Snizort, Bevan, and I

do not let grass grow under our feet. Our last thing is the great thing. The Danube and Don Canal will be an enormous work certainly. Politically speaking, it is immoral, because it will play the mischief with Turkey. But our great canalization and irrigation scheme in the Salt Lake basin is far finer. Shares are at par now; let us get five per cent. over, and out I go."

"You have too many irons in the fire," said Reginald.

"Not I. I come of a good money-getting stock. I wish you would give us a little of your advice sometimes."

"I will give it at once," said Reginald. "Sell out, and live like a reasonable being."

General Anders smiled, and went away, waving his hand.

Reginald went upstairs to the boy's room the first time that day. It was all

as he had arranged it for his return from sea, and he sat and pondered deeply about the short future which was left him in life.

“I am no use at all now,” he said. “Now I have provided for Mary there is nothing left for me to do. This house is very sad. I will stay here a week, and then I will go to Anders in London. I may possibly prevent him making a fool of himself. I would do that if I could, but it is hopeless; everything must go to the devil its own way. Still, I will go to London. I wish I was ill; but I am perfectly well. If I was ill, I could rest, and attend to my symptoms; but I have no such resource. Hang it all, I will go to London, and at all events get rid of the miserable round of petty botherations here. I shall get into trouble I have no doubt, but that will amuse me. I have not been in my place in Parliament more

than five times since February. I will go there. Snizort will be there, but he will only amuse me. Yes, I will go to the Duke and Duchess at Bolton Row."

CHAPTER XII.

REGINALD TRIES TO PAY HIS DEBT TO
GENERAL ANDERS.

REGINALD took leave of his sorrowing household, and told them where he was going. He went into Mary's room to bid her good-bye, and she told him that he was doing right. She tried to ask him something several times, but at last she wrote it down. It was a request, not a very great one; she wanted him to get for her the boy's sword and such things as he had left in the ship.

"My dear," said Reginald simply, "Hickson will bring them."

"Don't name him to me," she said, eagerly and angrily. "I can't bear to

hear his name mentioned. He tempted my boy to sea, and then let him go ashore to die in that hideous place. And tell Mrs. Hickson that I won't see her, nor that horrible little creature of a daughter of hers. They were both in it, and I will not see them. Tell Hester."

So Reginald left his "happy" home. His last words were, as he got into the carriage: "Hester, don't think me a coward for flying, but I should go mad here."

She kissed him and patted him on the shoulder. "Kind, long-suffering, old boy, for you will never be anything else, you are quite right to go. You are only an additional cause of anxiety to us, for we try so hard to save you trouble. Try to forget yourself in London, my dear; we women will manage one another here."

"Best of women, good-bye," said Reginald, jumping into the carriage. He was whirled away, and left Aunt Hester

standing motionless on the steps, with the *Times* on her head to keep off the sun. There was something in that paper which might have interested her, if she ever read the City Article.

Reginald was very comfortable in his carriage, and, at one time, calculated the results of driving all the way to London in it. It was only one hundred and twenty miles, and the thing was by no means impossible. He had every earthly comfort packed by his servant in it and about it; the only reason why he did not do so was that he had never heard of anybody doing it before. He, however, dismissed the idea, and relapsed into the *Spectator*, having left the *Times* behind for Aunt Hester, and thought no more about the matter.

Arriving at the station, he was aroused by finding a carriage blocking the way. It was Lord Snizort's carriage, and the

servants were getting the luggage down. A porter left Lord Snizort's servants, and ran to Reginald's carriage.

"Is Lord Snizort here," asked Reginald.

"Yes, sir."

"I will get out then, James," he whispered to his servant. "Don't move a thing, as you love me ; I don't know but what I may drive a station further on, and catch the next train."

He went into the station, and there was the great Snizort, with his head rammed close to the hole where they gave the tickets, abusing the clerk. Reginald at once saw that a journey to town with that man would add a year to his life. His resolution was taken at once. It might have been better, on the whole, if he had endured his lordship, because from Lord Snizort's habit of never leaving off talking he would probably, during the journey, have told Reginald a great many

things which it would have been better for him to know. However, he there and then made up his mind to drive to London, and, with his usual luck, lost his opportunity of hearing much. "Not," as he said afterwards to Goodge, "that it would have made the least difference to me, I never was lucky."

Lord Snizort having, purse in hand, bullied the clerk on the subject of the lateness of a train the day before yesterday, until the unhappy young man retreated, put his head through the ticket hole and glared round the interior in search of that young man, with a view to further objurgation. In the meantime, a farmer coming for his ticket, and seeing nothing in the usual place but a human stern, there and then shoved it, not knowing—as how should he?—that it belonged to one of the first noblemen in the county. Lord Snizort, finding him-

self assaulted in the rear, at once made a violent effort to recover himself, during which he dropped his hat on the clerk's side of the hole, hit himself violently on the back of the head, and sent about forty pounds in sovereigns and shillings flying all over the office. He then, bare-headed, advanced furiously on Reginald, and asked him what the devil he meant by doing that.

Reginald explained, and offered to help him to pick up his money. Lord Snizort was going to begin talking, and had got as far as—"My dear Hetherege, what can I say about this fearful disaster which has befallen you? ——" when Lady Snizort came sharply out of the ladies' waiting-room, bonnet, reticule, and all.

"The human mind," said her ladyship, not in the least degree knowing what she was going to say next, but conscious, like

some extempore preachers, that if she once got on her legs it was not easy to stop herself, "is so variously constituted that its ramifications are with difficulty followed by the most profound of ancient or modern sages. Taking grief and sympathy to be co-existent always in every class of being above the mere brutes, can I look on at the disaster——"

But by this time Lord Snizort had picked up some of his sovereigns and the servants were picking up the rest. He may be said to have got his wind, and started off on his own score—not that her ladyship ever dreamed of leaving off.

"The interests of a vast dominion like the British empire," said Lord Snizort, "thrown too often, as they are, into the hands of the ignorant and ignoble, are more often benefited by the knowledge and experience of such men as my friend Hetherege. When I see such a man, rend-

ing himself from a once happy home, under the shadow of a great affliction, to take his part in the councils of the nation, then I say that my heart warms to that man. Hetherege, I am devilish sorry for you."

"Manfully spoken, and kindly, Lord Snizort. I shall not be in London, however, for three days."

At this moment Lord Snizort was accosted from behind by his servant.

"Will you put your hat on, my lord?"

"What the ——" said Lord Snizort furiously. "I have got my hat on, sir. Do you think that I would stand bare-headed in a railway station?"

Lady Snizort had to stop her talk to point out to him that he had really knocked his hat off in the ticket hole, and that his servant had fetched it. Lord Snizort looked at the footman as if he would very much like to catch him at it again, and then put it on in a suspicious

manner, as if he was by no means sure even now.

But the train came, and Reginald helped to push Lady Snizort into the carriage, which was a process very similar to getting a fortnight's bundle of family linen for the wash down a narrow staircase. She talked the whole time, and Lord Snizort never left off. Then Reginald went out and spoke to his servants on the subject of driving to London. They fell into the plan willingly, and a message being despatched for horse and man necessities to meet them by train, away went Reginald with every independent comfort in that little microcosm, his carriage, through one of the most beautiful parts of England.

From village to town, from town to city, from city to village again; under overarching elms, across bright rivers, past stately houses, and flower-encircled

cottages ; the weather beautiful and bright, the roads perfection, and the interest continual. Old market-houses, quaint streets in village and town, bridges, and, lastly, churches too numerous to count or to remember : some small, half hidden among the graves, seeming nothing more than larger tombstones themselves, some tall, solemn, and majestic, only requiring a Benedictine monk or two round the porch to carry you in imagination back some four centuries, when the “ Bishop of Rome ” had authority in these realms such as neither king nor kaiser has now, and when the dissenting minister in his garden, or the Rector on his brown cob, would by no means have found that the lines had fallen to them in pleasant places, but the contrary ; nay, when Mrs. Rector and her pony carriage did not exist—a most wonderful thing to think of. Then

the great city, with its red roofs and the high chalk downs staring down the ends of streets, close overhead; the swarming schoolboys pervading the town in every direction, and seeming almost as numerous as the townsfolk. And last, not least, the long cathedral, into which it was pleasant to saunter before dinner, and hear the splendid evening service while the afternoon sun came flaming through the many-coloured windows, making the white-robed clergymen as gay as though the old times had come back and they were in Catholic vestments. Then the summer's evening settling down over the town, and the ramble among the lawns and groves behind the great fane of Wykeham, with the bright chalk river forcing its crystal water everywhere under the quaint overhanging houses.

“ Why have I never travelled before?”

thought Reginald. "I have heard of change of scene. Matters look so very different to me now from what they did at home. The *post equitem* theory is partly humbug. I will certainly travel, and travel alone, too."

Things did not look quite so bright when he woke the next morning; but when he was on the road again he cheered up, and passed a pleasant day with the books he had bought at Winchester, with looking at the passing landscape, and with getting a walk up-hill now and then, or sauntering along the road for his carriage to overtake him. By the time he arrived in London he felt wonderfully cheered and refreshed, and the unfeigned welcome which he got at Bolton Row was very pleasant indeed. He had proposed to go to a private hotel, but they would not hear of it; he would be free as air there, and there he must stay.

On the whole, he was not sorry at the arrangement; it gave him society without any trouble, and the freedom of avoiding it if he thought proper. The Duke and Duchess were seeing a great deal of company, more than ever Reginald remembered. Isabel certainly received at least once or twice a week, in some way or another, and was out to two or three places every night. Reginald ought, by right, to have offered the use of his horses in addition to her own, but he knew how good servants dislike being at the orders of any one but their masters, and so did not. Isabel knew his motive, and never asked for the carriage once.

Isabel had, on the whole, been disappointed with her *protégée*; Miss Murdoch ought to have married better somehow. It was true that disgraceful brother of hers had prevented it, and it was no fault of hers; but was it such a dis-

appointment that she should become a mere sailor's wife. Certainly she would be a baronet's wife as soon as Captain Hickson's cousin had the decency to die, but she ought to have done much better. She had become a very second-rate person, and her little daughter was unendurable. Isabel, to forget a rather disappointed life, mixed in society more and more, and General Anders was nothing loth to accompany her and her husband.

Reginald allowed the necessity of society, but he did not care for it, and wondered that Anders did. Anders laughed, and said that it was necessary to his position, and so turned the matter off.

The General's friendship towards him had entirely revived. They were together as they had been at the best of times, and all their old confidence was fully restored. They began almost the first day to have long talks over the present state of affairs,

and Reginald's face grew longer and longer as matters were disclosed to him. The General was getting uneasy himself, by no means too soon.

The speculations were so extremely intricate, that Reginald, with all his head for figures, found it very difficult to understand them. The General seemed to be in everything; Lord Snizort in several; but in the largest and most doubtful of all the affairs he found, first Bevan, and next Theodorides, the two Americans almost supreme. It gave him extreme uneasiness, and he said so.

“You seem rather to have lost your head, Anders,” he said frankly. “It would have been much better if I had never left you.”

“I confess that now,” said the General; “but I am a great fool, and I have dwelt too much on one idea—on the forbidden subject. Don't speak of it; we can do very well yet, depend upon it.”

“We may still,” said Reginald; “but we must make haste. You might make a terrible mess of affairs as we now stand. It is perfectly obvious that you must get out of at least one-half these things, and take very great care about the other half.”

“I allow it, Hetherege, I perfectly allow it; but don’t you see that it is impossible, the removal of my name would bring on a smash. I am the only responsible person in at least three of the largest affairs, unless you consider Theodorides and Bevan responsible.”

“I profoundly distrust both of them. We have not the remotest proof that they are either of them sound men. The smallest check now would be extremely disastrous. These schemes are all good enough in the end, but they have been so fearfully promoted. Who did all our advertising and puffing?”

“ Principally, nay entirely, Theodorides and Bevan.”

“ I will go to work at once and see what can be done ; meanwhile we must give confidence. We are both members of the Stock Exchange, it will therefore be necessary for me to enter into public partnership with you as a stockbroker. I am known as a safe man, and that will be the best thing we can do. It will give us time, and I believe that I can put things right in time ; but we must be very careful in future.

“ But, my dear Hetherege, you risk all you have in case of matters turning out badly. You are safe ; why rush into danger for me ? ”

“ I have provided for Mary, and the boy is dead. I am only paying off an old debt,” said Reginald smiling ; “ do you remember when you used those words to me ? I wanted the money you gave me

then ten times more than you do now. Don't bury your face in your hands now ; we shall get through very well. I have no one left to work for but you ; the deuce is in it if we don't manage. Why, old warrior, rouse yourself for the battle : with an extra £200,000 we shall be rich enough. Don't be cast down in any way."

"What will you do first, you best and most generous of men ?"

"I'll go and see Bevan," said Reginald very resolutely. "I will go and see what I think of the man."

"Do so," said the General. "I had best tell Snizort of your resolution, I suppose."

"Yes ; the question is how much more you ought to tell him—it is a difficult problem. I may have to sacrifice everything ; but if matters go wrong he must be warned in time. He is an awful nuisance, but he is very frank and honest.

The first thing to do is to execute the deed of partnership. See to that above all things."

And so Reginald went out on foot, saying to himself, "If we do not mind Theodorides and Bevan, we shall all die in the workhouse." He went to call on Mr. Bevan, but Mr. Bevan was not at home ; he therefore left his card.

CHAPTER XIII.

TWO WORTHIES; OR, OLD FRIENDS WITH A NEW
FACE.

JAMES MURDOCH and his long lost cousin, Simpson the forger, sat comfortably together in the apartments of the former in Piccadilly. These excellent gentlemen were at breakfast, on admirable terms with themselves and the world. From the breakfast before them, and the various things to drink on the breakfast table, a close observer of human nature would have concluded that both gentlemen were in the habit of taking quite as much stimulant as was good for them overnight, if not a little more.

“I was infernally cut last night,” said George Simpson; “but I won like blazes. Give me the Curaçoa again, James, before you begin business.”

“Now don’t mop up more than another glass, cousin, because I want to talk seriously to you.”

“Well then, give me a cigar, and then I shall be as sound as a bell. Now fire away.”

“I am going,” said James Murdoch, *alias* Mr. Bevan, the great American financier, who, without his blue spectacles, looked an extremely handsome scoundrel of between forty and fifty, “to go into a general review of all our joint affairs.”

“And I,” said George Simpson, otherwise Count Theodorides, who, with his dyed and beautifully curled moustaches and hair, looked not in the least like the young gentleman who had in a weak moment committed a great forgery, “am

all attention. I suppose you will agree with me that some change must be made soon. We are both running the risk of detection every day, and that would be uncomfortable, to say the least of it."

"Pish," said James Murdoch, "we are so deep in that they dare not blow upon us."

"There you are wrong," said George Simpson. "The family have quietly all withdrawn from any business connected with us, and General Anders, should anything go in any way wrong, would merely set himself right with the world by becoming the injured innocent; and besides, Anders is a creature I hate—an honest man."

"He has gone pretty close to the wind in that character," said James Murdoch.

"He fancies himself one, however," said George Simpson, "which is quite as

bad as if he were one for our purposes. Besides, you are in a different position from what I am. You were staying there down at Hollingscroft, at the house of that illimitable idiot, Reginald, with your own sister, Mrs. Hickson, and meeting her twenty times a day : she did not know you from Adam. The first moment I set eyes on Aunt Hester, she knew me, and a fine cock-and-bull story I had to make up to put her off the scent. I was surprised at her biting, but she did ; and those boys, Alfred Simpson and Lionel Murdoch, took the whole story in also ; though if their fathers ever met me, I should be blown upon at once. I tell you that I consider my sacred person in danger, and that I intend to realize and *vamos the ranche*. London is very nice, but Vienna is much nicer."

"I would not cut partnership yet, old boy," said James Murdoch. "Remember

when we met in New York. You, the Greek merchant, were devilishly out at the elbows, while I had made money in a certain ring; and had not only money, but credit. Remember that."

"I do remember," said George Simpson. "You were devilish kind to me, I allow. But do let us get out of it soon. Let me be an honest man again. Let me put my foot upon my native heath, and my name be Dickinson. Let me be quit of this humiliating disguise, and appear in a red wig and a wooden leg, if necessary. Let me once more be free to meet the eyes of my fellow-creatures without a blush."

"Don't talk nonsense," said James Murdoch. "We can do much better than vamposing. Why did we come here at all?"

"We came here on an exceedingly foolish errand, relating to a supposed

second will of old Digby's ; and you have discovered that it does not exist."

" I know that it does. But you are not putting the case truly ; we came here first to force on a settlement under the old will, and take our chance of our share from the honour of the two families."

" I got my part done there," said George Simpson.

" Capitally ; but glass turns bullets, and your fool was a fool in every respect. If he had imitated the cry of a British female in distress, he would have had the old idiot outside in one instant, and then, you know——"

" Well, I am very glad it did not succeed," said George Simpson downright.

" Then," continued James Murdoch, without heeding him, " our plan was to get possession of this will, and make a grand bargain out of it. I discovered

that it had been removed, and, until this morning, I thought myself sold."

"I don't believe in it," said George Simpson.

"I do, however," said James; "and I will tell you why directly. Meanwhile, I, through my reputation for finance, got myself and you introduced to that ass, General Anders, and I think that you will allow that we have made a good thing of it."

"So much so that the will may go to the devil as far as I am concerned," said George Simpson.

"Yes; but you are in with me, old fellow, and I must really trouble you to stay in. Our interests are precisely identical."

"The death of this cub, George, may make a difference certainly."

"The cub is not dead," said James Murdoch. "Clumber got hold of him,

and got him planted in the bush—for what reason he is not likely to tell me. The thing will be known all over London in three weeks ; and, meanwhile, he is coming to London to try a bargain with me first.”

“ Who is this Clumber ? ”

“ That old sinner, don’t you know ? Why, that man Thomas, who used to keep the house for the Duchess, and was transported for robbing the Duke years ago. He knew the trick of the shutters of that empty room, which that arch-idiot, Anders, keeps shut up, and he got in—a baby might get in—and, from what he overheard from the old couple, laid his hand on the right paper, and decamped.”

“ When did he do that ? ”

“ When he was last in England. He had tried a bargain with me long before, but I could not find the cash, and it fell

through. I did not know the whole truth then—he lied so ; and not finding himself comfortable in England, and being at that time in a state of muddle, he went back to Australia with his secret. He has done well out there, it seems ; but he is an undecided fool, and I have no doubt that I shall make a bargain with him ; in which case, of course, we dictate our terms to the family.”

“ Some people are too clever by half,” said George Simpson. “ Suppose this wonderful will was to go against our claims.”

“ If it did he would hardly offer to make a bargain with *me*. I suspect that it puts the Hethereges in a far worse position than it does you or I.”

“ But the document will not be worth much after so many years,” said George Simpson : “ much better sell out and go.”

“I shall see it and decide,” said James. “It will probably lead to a compromise in which we shall certainly take a very large sum of money. What I want is for you to wait and see. If you *vamos*, things will come to a smash; I want you to wait and see what we can make out of this business.”

“Very well,” said George Simpson, “I will wait. But, with that frankness which is so agreeable in families, and which has been practised so long in ours, I think that you are no better than a fool. Your whole plan appears to me to be mops and brooms. We have done thundering well by finding such gulls on the wing as Anders and Snizort. In my opinion we had better clear out; we have run fearful risks together, and I am getting rather sick of it. You don’t seem to see that by concealing this will you commit a cool felony. Oakum is

very nasty to the fingers, and those new cells in Coldbath Fields are, as I am told, exquisitely uncomfortable."

So Count Theodorides went out for a walk whistling. He was dressed most perfectly, and looked like a bridegroom, when he came into Storr and Mortimer's. The eminent Greek merchant had an interview with one of the partners, to their mutual satisfaction. The financier simperingly let the jeweller know that he was about to contract a matrimonial alliance, and wanted some diamonds. He selected £14,000 worth, and paid for them with a cheque on the spot, remarking casually that he was not certain of his exact balance at Glyn's, and saying that he would wait while one of their clerks stepped round with the cheque. "We never know," he said, "how we may stand at any particular moment. I give you 'my word,'" he added laughing, "that

I was actually overdrawn at Drummond's the other day. It was extremely amusing, but an actual fact." The partner laughed heartily at the absurdity of the great Count Theodorides being overdrawn anywhere ; but it was a remarkable fact that the diamonds remained in his hands until the clerk returned with the money ; after which, rumour said that he winked at his head clerk, and in the course of the afternoon sent a private note to Messrs. Howell and James, receiving for answer that Count Theodorides had bought diamonds to the extent of £8,000 pounds there that afternoon, and had paid for them like a gentleman. Drawing about £6,000 pounds more out of two banks, he reluctantly left £2,000 in the hands of the London and County Bank, not because he would not have drawn it out, but because he arrived there after the bank was shut, and the Scotch train to Edinburgh, then not so

very long established, started at eight, and he did not intend to wait till next day. From Leith to Rotterdam, with a passport from the Lord Provost, then from Rotterdam to Hamburg, was not a journey which took very long even then. Delaying in the neighbourhood of that pleasant city until a ship started for New York, he went on board of her, and at last turned his back upon an ungrateful Europe with about £28,000 of convertible property in his pockets, leaving his commercial liabilities in England to take care of themselves. He was of a humble and contented spirit, and left others to suffer those evils which are inseparable from inordinate avarice.

CHAPTER XIV.

JAMES MURDOCH MAKES HIS RESOLUTION.

SUCH an extremely important and agreeable man as Count Theodorides was very soon missed from the commercial circles which he adorned, and where everything about him was popular except his credit. Reginald's open partnership with General Anders certainly counterbalanced to some extent the disappearance of Theodorides, but the credit of certain great speculators was extremely lowered by it, and people began to sell out in the most ominous manner.

Bevan was very cheerful over the matter, but in reality was desperately

savage about it; and it is very probable that violence would have been done had he met Simpson in a safe place. Still, he was tolerably secured for the future, having a pretty warm nest. The thing which exasperated him was, that had Simpson stayed on he might have done better. He only awaited the arrival of Clumber to decide on his future action.

He went to meet that gentleman the day he landed, and they had a long and intimate talk together. Neither would trust the other, and James Murdoch found that a sea voyage, combined with the absence of a furious and ill-tempered wife, and the companionship of an amiable daughter, had very much changed Clumber for the worse according to Murdoch, though possibly some might think slightly for the better.

“I got an interesting letter from you from Australia,” began James Murdoch.

“ Well, it was a foolish letter to have written,” said Clumber, “ and I am sorry I wrote it. I said too much ; but I was always frank and honest in my dealings. Well, what have you to say about it now ? ”

“ Do you know the contents of the paper you have in your possession ? ” said Murdoch.

“ It is not in my possession,” said Clumber.

“ There you lie, of course,” said Murdoch. “ I wonder you take the trouble to do it.”

“ I do not lie,” said Clumber. “ If I did you could beat me at it.”

“ Well, we will not quarrel,” said Murdoch. “ Do you know the contents of this paper, or do you not ? ”

“ Yes, I do.”

“ Is it favourable to me ? ”

“ That you must decide. On the whole,

I should say yes ; you must judge about that for yourself, when you have read it."

"How soon will that be?"

"When you have paid me £10,000 for the privilege."

"But I don't know what is in it."

"You can't tell till you have read it."

"You want to break with me entirely, I see," said James.

"I don't say that. I only want £10,000 for a sight of it. That is my only offer. It is worth every penny of that to others, and I give you till to-morrow."

"Where shall I meet you to-morrow to see it?" said James.

Clumber named the place—a tavern near Piccadilly, extremely public, and refused to name any other, so James was forced to be contented.

When he was alone in the street he began thinking very deeply. "I am by

no means sure that Simpson was not right when he called me an ass. I came over here, years ago, to see whether anything could be done with this old rascal Thomas, now Clumber, whom I knew to have information for some years. He refuses to deal, and goes back to Australia. I came here to try and find out something for myself, and utterly fail, but get in connection with Anders and do well with my talents. I am safe—I am unrecognized—no one knows who I am but this old Thomas. I have a good mind to realize, and leave the whole matter of the will alone. I can get out of the principal things perfectly well now Reginald has come to back up Anders. I certainly ruin them both, but that can't be helped. I don't see anything to prevent my openly selling out every single penny. I am not actually fraudulent like Simpson, who never knew how to keep the

right side of the hedge, as I always do, and who consequently has had to sneak away like a thief for fear of his accounts coming into court. No, I shall denounce Simpson for swindling me, and get out with all comfort myself. That will be the best way. I will come Bevan, the scrupulous financier, over them ; I will expose Simpson to my own honour and glory."

CHAPTER XV.

RUIN.

REGINALD sat in his study in Bolton Row late on the night of the day when the above-mentioned interview between James Murdoch and old Clumber had taken place. It was a wild, wet night, with such weather as often comes in the middle of July. Cold driving squalls of wind and rain swept round the corners of the streets, and made the buffeted passengers giddy with the stinging on their faces and the booming of the wind on their ears. It was a desolate night, with a hundred ghosts in every gust: a night for a long walk and a contention with the elements, and then a brisk fire.

Reginald had a fire, and sat before it listening to the wind. His was a comfortable room, and the light of candle and fire shone pleasantly on everything around; yet Reginald cared no more for the fire than he did for the wind. A highly honourable letter was in his hand, and the crash was as good as come. Mr. Bevan, in a kind, almost affectionate, letter to Reginald, announced that he was about to withdraw from all speculations in England, and invest more largely in America. He also, in a friendly way, said that he believed that Lord Snizort was going to realize, and that he knew him to be thoroughly suspicious since the disappearance of Theodorides.

Why many words. The letter meant practically that General Anders and he were left entirely alone, and almost certainly ruined. If Bevan and Snizort had held firm, there was a chance, with Regi-

nald's talents, that they would have pulled through ; but Bevan had deserted, and the great name of Snizort was no more a tower of strength. Nothing was left save two weary and penniless old men to hide their heads, and die if possible without disgrace.

He was very sorry for Anders, far more than for himself. Anders had been such a noble, generous friend to him and to everybody. Latterly his mind had gone a little wrong about money matters, and he had done things which he might never have done had he thought twice ; but it was all over now. He was very old, and this news would kill him ; then the film which had come over his eyes would be removed for ever, and the soul would shine out after death with a brilliancy greater than had ever emanated from it on earth.

Alas, poor General ! was ever story

sadder than his: after such a career to die in poverty, nay, possibly in disgrace. It did not matter to Reginald now the boy was gone: he had been used to it all his life. "I," he thought, "have never known honour of any kind. I had riches once, but they were a misery to me. All I love are provided for—Hester and Mary are well off. I do not care at all. I have been in the way ever since I was born, and whether I go out of the world rich or poor is of very little consequence. But Anders is different. Yes, Anders is very different. The sooner he knows it the better. He had far better know it to-night."

He went downstairs, knowing where he should find the General. He was sitting before a lamp, reading. Reginald entered the room so quietly that the General did not hear him.

He was sitting in the old, old room

where Digby had last seen his relations, where he once, a beautiful boy, had sat on his father's knee—where William Hetherage had said to him, "My boy, if you ever want a friend, come to me." He sat there now, an old man, and William Hetherage's grandson was in the room to tell him that he was ruined and must die in poverty.

Reginald felt the situation more keenly than he had ever felt anything in his life since the loss of Charles, or the news of the boy's death. Could not the bitter blow come from any hand but his? Was God always to afflict him through those he loved best? There sat the noble old man, handsome still, with the drooping grey moustache and the white short-cropped hair. His head was erect still; but the hand benefited ten times over by the old man's generosity was upraised in the dark to inflict a blow upon it which would smite it down to rise no more.

Yet it must be done. Perhaps it had better be done by his hand than by the hand of a stranger. Reginald advanced, within the light of the lamp, and laid his hand on the General's shoulder.

"I know that hand well," said the General. "How well one knows the hand of a friend who brings good news."

"Anders, my old friend—my kind friend, be a man. We are ruined."

The General put down his book, and looked up into Reginald's face.

"I am glad you brought the news, Reginald. I had a feeling about it, because everything seemed to be going so well. Will many go with us?"

"Oh, no one. I will answer for that."

"Then you must try to forgive me, Reginald. I was insane when I let you sign that deed of partnership. I had hopes that you might have saved things for us. Is all gone?"

“Everything, I fear.”

“Reginald, say you forgive me. If you will only say that I will never complain at all. I have been an evil friend for you, my poor fellow. I have done no good in this world. Only say that you forgive me, and I will face facts with you, and go through everything with a bold heart.”

“I have nothing to forgive,” said Reginald. “I have no feeling in my heart towards you but the most profound sorrow and compassion. You have always been the most sincere and constant friend I ever had. Forgive!—I have nothing to forgive. I say it ten times over.”

“I do not ask you if there is any hope,” said the General. “I know there is none. How has it happened so suddenly?”

“Snizort and Bevan are going to withdraw.”

“H’m. *We* might have withdrawn, and left them in the lurch, if I had taken your advice sooner. Well, Reginald, I have ruined you, and you have not one word of anger for me.”

“You are putting the case wrongly,” said Reginald. “But you fully realise the fact that we are both utterly broken men.”

“Yes. It is a lamentable pity about this house. My sister will break her heart about it. It is mine, you know, and it must go.”

“I fear so.”

“Shall we have enough to live on?” said the General.

“That I cannot say. I fear not. I fear that we are dipped so that it will be a bankruptcy.”

“All your powers of finance will not stop that?”

“Not with honesty, I fear. We may

compound ; but affairs are very intricate."

"And you do not complain?"

"No. I have no complaint. Of whom should I complain? Certainly not of you."

They sat silent for a long time, and amidst all the rich furniture of the dead merchant, the ghosts, of which the old couple here, lonely so long, used to speak, seemed as though they moved again.

The Duke and Duchess were away ; there was no one in the house awake but themselves and the hall porter. The wind had ceased, but the rain was coming down more strongly, and the footfalls in Bolton Row, getting less and less frequent, were rendered less audible than usual by the dripping of the water from the eaves and spouts, which confused themselves with the footfalls, and seemed to mock and mimic them.

“Those old people,” said Anders, lighting a cigar, and thrusting his hands deep into his pockets, “used, year after year, to watch for my footfall in that street. One will come to-night, not mine; one will come to you; and then, quiet as you are, and nobly as you have behaved, you will rise and curse me.”

His mind was evidently affected, but Reginald let him be, and smoked also. He wished that he would go to bed, and he urged it on him; but he got nothing but an emphatic “No,” and they sat on and listened to the footfalls passing: some swift, some slow, some hesitating, some resolute, until, at last, there came a footfall swifter than the others, running on the pavement and in the roadway, splashing in the rain pools. It paused at the door, and there was a hesitating knock, to which the door was at once opened. The footfall came bounding up

the stairs ; some one burst open the door, and there, in the lamplight, stood the dead George with the rain-drops in his curls, looking about for Reginald with parted lips.

“ Now will you curse me ? ” shouted General Anders, standing up, and raising his hand on high. “ Now will you tell me that you wish I had lain dead among the Spanish vineyards before you set eyes on me ? Do you see I have not only ruined you, but I have ruined one whom you love better than yourself. I have taken from over your head the pleasant home which you had prepared for him, and left him in the most important time of his life a beggar like ourselves. Curse me now, Reginald ; and I will never reply, Reginald.”

The boy's head was on Reginald's bosom, pressed close against a heart from which no curses ever came. The moment

was intensely bitter, and intensely sweet also. For the first time in his life Reginald was physically overcome. Trying to stretch a hand out to the General, he fell heavily on the floor, like a dead man.

“I have done well by this man,” said the General, “for I have killed him.”

CHAPTER XVI

A PAUSE.

THE General had known of George's safety all the afternoon, and of his having come in a certain ship from which he had landed at Portsmouth. Bevan had also written to him a similiar note to that which he had sent to Reginald. He had seen that matters were come to a crisis, and he was in hopes that Reginald would have gone to bed without a conversation. He was actually certain that the boy would come on that evening, and he wanted Reginald to have one happy night before he broke the desperate intelligence to him. Finding that Reginald was as well informed as himself, he

had still not heart to speak, but sat in his bitter misery until the boy should come. Now it was all over, and he was bending over Reginald, who lay cold and pale before him.

He put his hand upon his heart. The palpitations were very strong, but irregular. He sent the boy for the hall porter, who raised his head. They got him wine, and by degrees revived him. When he sat up he called for the boy, who came at once to him, dazed and frightened.

“I don’t care much now,” he said; “I have got *him*. General, old fellow, we shall be quite right now. We will manage somehow. I have been ill for the first time in my life. My heart seemed to stop all in one moment. We must keep this perfectly quiet,” he added, with great emphasis. “*It won’t do to have it known just now.* I have given

the boy's mother money, too, lately ; I am not certain how the law stands : they might take it from her if the worst came to the worst, and we made a bad composition. All these things must be seen to, and I must live to see to them. If this gets about it will play the mischief with us, and confuse matters entirely. Don't any of you say anything about it."

There came a thundering knock at the door, and the porter went away.

"That is the Duchess," said Reginald. "Give me my cravat. Don't tell her or the Duke ; they are good people, but they might talk. Say nothing to them of anything at present."

The Duke and Duchess came from their last party, and reeled with astonishment at seeing George. Down went Isabel's grand cloak on the floor ; down went her fan ; down went her scent-bottle. The Duke, on the other hand, seized George

and covered him with kisses after the French manner. The two good souls were perfectly overwhelmed with joy. Isabel was the first of them who spoke any sense.

“Does his mother know?” she asked. “No! Why, then, who will break it to her? Would it not be better for George and I to start at daybreak? Why, of course it would. I will take him down. But meanwhile we must hear the whole story. She will die of joy unless it is broken to her. Reginald, you look very ill; had you not better go to bed?”

“Yes; I am not very bright,” said Reginald. “Anders and the boy will see me to bed; and so, good-night.”

An hour passed in Reginald’s bedroom in explanations. The boy told his whole story about his bush adventure, and then it came out that he had sailed home in the very ship which brought Clumber and

his daughter ; and moreover, that George seemed very violently in love with that young lady, which was, seeing that he was only a boy of seventeen, somewhat amusing. His grandfather and General Anders made great fun of him on this point, and George, having no idea that anything was wrong, beyond his grandfather's having fainted, expressed his determination of marrying that young lady as soon as he was of age, and if she said yes, when he asked her.

CHAPTER XVII.

ADA IS A MATCH FOR JAMES MURDOCH.

THERE is no doubt that Clumber intended a great deal of vague villainy about a certain discovery which he had made. Having lived in the house in Bolton Row for so many years, he knew everything about it. And he had overheard the old couple speak very often of the document which they had witnessed the night before the death of the merchant Digby, and which they believed to be a new will, or, at least, some document of very great importance. This was the document about which they communicated with General Anders after

Vittoria, in case of their death. For the first time General Anders knew that a certain room in the house was closed at the merchant's desire, and that the document was supposed by the old people to be there. In another paper they had sent to him, in his father's hand, there were hints of something dark and terrible, quite sufficient to make a bolder man than General Anders hesitate to enter the room; and, as years went on, hesitation grew to dislike, dislike to horror. What the old couple actually knew in detail was buried in their graves, but it was quite enough, as we have seen, to make them carry out their master's dying wish, and to conceal the room by any artifice in their power, and keep the secret among as few as possible.

Thomas Morris, now Mr. Clumber, had got hold of the secret of the

last document, and had known where it was put in the old man's drawers. He had, quite late in life, possessed himself of it by opening an iron shutter which every one would have thought secure, and had, since that time, held it as a kind of stock-in-trade to be bargained for some day or another, with some one of the innumerable claimants in Chancery, he cared not which. Latterly, since he had, by the very old ruse of changing his name, got rid of the convict taint, at least in his own person, he had been doing extremely well, and did not care to trouble about the matter. But in an evil hour for him he married the beautiful and accomplished lady whom we have previously met—greatly to his deterioration as far as she was concerned, but greatly to his amelioration as far as her pretty and really charming daughter was concerned.

In an evil moment he confided to his wife that he knew something about the great lawsuit which would put quite another face on it. By degrees she got it out of him, and inflamed his brain with schemes of potential wealth, of which he could never have dreamt for himself. A man of utterly undecided purpose, who had drunk a great deal in early and middle life, he had not one clear scheme, such as his wife would have carved out for him, and executed too, if need were, but a dozen confused ones. Every one of his own schemes about this miserable document was feasible, and without great danger; every one of his wife's was highly dangerous, and the most of them impossible.

He never had even the pluck to carry away the document out of England. During that period of his life when he indulged habitually in strong drinks, he

had determined plans about it ; but they were never carried out. A great criminal would have made money out of it years before ; a small criminal—he never could make up his mind about it. It was in one of his moods of indecision that he got possession of George's person, with what feeble results we have seen.

It was more accident than design that threw George on board the same ship with Clumber and his daughter. There were few ships for Europe in those days, and both requiring to go to Europe at the same time they could hardly have avoided such an accident had they wished it, which none of them certainly did ; in fact, it was a very pleasant arrangement for all parties.

Ada and George were very much together on deck, and very great confidence existed between them. He was the first gentleman she had ever been with, and

his conversation was so fresh, frank, and intelligent, that it became a necessity to her. The poor girl seemed to live in a different atmosphere when she was with him, and she determined to possess herself thoroughly of her stepfather's confidence.

It was not difficult: her influence over him was all for good, and now he was away from his savage wife it had great effect. Besides, old and battered as he was, the ministrations of such a really charming daughter were extremely pleasant and soothing. It was not very long before the girl knew almost as much as her father did, and emphatically determined to use it for her own purposes, that is to say, for the benefit of her young friend.

She opened the trenches on her father very cautiously, but she had a good time for her siege, for a three months' voyage

then was not by any means an uncommon thing. Always pleasant in her conversation, she spoke now to him about subjects of which he never heard at home. We do not mean to say that she enlisted religion in her cause, her instincts were too good to do such a thing as that; the idea of using sacred subjects for worldly ends, however innocent, would not have seemed to her justifiable, more particularly as she might have to tread on some extremely doubtful ground. Her talk was of quiet peaceful subjects, and above all of a happy and virtuous old age, unclouded by any thing which might weigh heavily upon his conscience. He listened to her by no means unwillingly, and she got more and more into his confidence as the voyage went on.

At last he told her plainly that he had deeply committed himself to James Murdoch, who knew his history, and that it

would be extremely difficult to back out. He had written to James Murdoch, who was in London under a false name, some weeks ago, and he was afraid of his vengeance if he played fast and loose with him. The girl asked him point blank what James Murdoch could possibly do to him.

The question was a puzzling one, and he had never faced it before. The clear, honest purpose of the girl gave a clearness to her intellect, and made it of vast use to him. She dwelt on that point: what could James Murdoch do to him after all?

He told her that he was capable of anything; that he had once, at least, compassed Reginald's death; that he was a swindler and a scoundrel, and would fight to the very last. She let that question go by for a time.

She pointed out to him that now for

many years he had been groping with a weak, undecided hand through crooked ways, and that a great opportunity had arisen for putting himself right by frank surrender of his powers. "You want money for your secret," she said; "of what use is money to you except to be a burden and a misery to you in your old age? You have as much as you want, that you have gained honestly. Why now make it more by dishonesty? Why try for more money, at least in this way?"

"Your mother, my dear, would like it, and you would marry better."

"My mother is not to be trusted with money: she has never made a good use of it. As for me, I tell you fairly, that I can never marry. My origin would prevent my ever marrying a gentleman, and, after my association with this boy, whom

love like a brother, I most certainly

cannot endure the society of a man in our set. I do not intend to return to Australia at all. Pray dismiss both my mother and myself from your thoughts. You have been a kind stepfather to me, and, sooner than see you run into new danger for my sake, I myself would go straight to Reginald Hetherege, and tell him what I know."

"Which is nothing in reality, my love, and which would lead me into great trouble."

"True ; I was speaking too fast. But this James Murdoch, if he is the swindler you say he is, turn the tables on him. Threaten to expose him unless he leaves the country ; then take your secret to Reginald Hetherege like a man. Say I meant to do so and so, but I have repented of it. The document is of value to you ; if you approve of my conduct make me a present to satisfy my wife. If

you give me nothing, give me at least the credit of acting straightforwardly in my old age. I have eaten the bread of the house of Digby for many years. I am not far from the grave, and I wish to make reparation for what I did so many years ago."

These arguments, repeated many times, had overwhelming effect at last. The pleasant company of George also had much to do with the result possibly. At all events the battle was won before the voyage was over. The only stipulation which the old man made to Ada being that he should break with James Murdoch in his own way.

What his way was we have seen. Half afraid of his man, he imposed an impossible condition. James Murdoch gave the business up, and retired from the speculation, setting to work publicly to sell out of everything in which he was

interested in common with General Anders and Reginald. He suffered very little in pocket, for the different speculations were by no means in a bad odour as yet, being, on an average, at par, some over, some under. Things which he had come into for a song were worth twice what they were at first, it must be owned, partly by his masterly talent of puffing and promoting, though mainly by the great names of Anders and Reginald, the former of whom had the character of being one of the cleverest men in Europe, and the luckiest. The latter, too, being known to have made a very large fortune out of absolutely nothing, which was in some quarters a great recommendation, though not so great a one in others.

One little cloud remained on James Murdoch's horizon. If the old rascal, Clumber, would not come to terms, he must be silenced as to his (James's)

identity. James calculated this "raw" on him would be about two thousand pounds. He would have put the old man out of the way had it not been dangerous in this country, and, he thought, unnecessary. He therefore gave up his mind to realising with remarkable rapidity, and Lord Snizort followed suit with great promptitude. Things looked more and more ruinous for General Anders and Reginald. A sounding smash in those quarters was most undoubtedly pending.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BREAKING UP.

REGINALD worked night and day with Anders and by himself, but it seemed to be no use whatever. They warned all the pleasant little set at Hollingscroft that the house was gone from over their heads; but Mary did not care, for she had got her boy. Mrs. Hickson did not care, for her husband was coming home. Aunt Hester discovered that the place was damp, and that it bored her—the old house in Fitzroy Square was far preferable. She opined that there would be plenty of room for them all there, and why on earth they ever came to this

ridiculous Hollingscroft she could not conceive. She should only be too glad to get out of it. "What do you say, little maid?" she asked Emily Hickson, lately a great favourite of hers. "Will you not be happier in Fitzroy Square?"

"Oh, far happier; and Mr. Hetherege, I am sure, will be glad to get back to his old town life, instead of being bothered with these stupid country people. *Mark my words,*" said the young lady, "they will, if we stay here, come sympathising with Mr. Hetherege about losing his money, as they did when we thought George was drowned. I can only say that if any of them take the unwarrantable liberty of sympathising with *me*, I shall slap their faces, and so I don't deceive them. *If* the General and Mr. Hetherege have lost their money it is the duty of all of us to rally round them in a phalanx, and prevent audacious people

from letting them hear any more about it. I suppose it is a misfortune for them to lose their money, but while they had it they made us very happy with it. What we must do is to prevent their suffering from the sympathy and compassion of their fellow-men. Whatever errors they may have committed, they have not deserved *that*. While they are among us they will be kept cheerful and made happy, not driven wild by sympathy. I put it to you, as sensible people, who could ever endure the sympathy of the Snizorts? I should go mad myself, and send Lady Snizort's ridiculous old bonnet flying on to the top of the fire."

But in spite of Emily's manifesto, she slipped into Aunt Hester's bed that night, and, when she had done crying, had a long talk with her. Whatever they or the others might say, they loved Hollingscroft dearly, and it was a bitter blow for

them to leave it. Still it must be done, and they all agreed that General Anders and Reginald were the first people to be thought about.

Goodge, who was going off by the night-train to London, applauded Emily highly before she went to bed, getting her alone in the picture gallery. "My dear," he said, "you must forget every word I said to you once. You are behaving most nobly. Yet, if I were to speak to you much, I know you would cry. Are you so very sorry over this matter?"

"Yes, sir."

"Because we have lost the house."

"Yes, for I loved it dearly; but more on other grounds."

"Selfish, I fear," said Goodge.

"Yes, entirely selfish. I am sorry for the General, I am sorry for Mr. Hethege; but think of that boy. We shall be separated now, and what will he ever

do without *me*? That Australian girl will never be to him what I should have been. He will bitterly find his mistake in choosing her instead of me, when it is too late. I would have been a mother to that boy, but all you men are exactly alike. I may live to be a second mother to his children. It is all I hope for now."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE CLOSED ROOM IS OPENED.

GOODGE had been summoned to London by what was a rare thing in those days—a telegram. Generally, before the Crimean war, those now familiar documents used to burst into a house like a shell, and frighten every one nearly out of their mind; they generally in those times foreboded death, dangerous illness, or the sudden stoppage of a bank. The quiet people who now send their shilling's worth to say that they shall not be home to dinner till after the soup, have no idea of the effect of those missives in old times. Goodge got one telling him to be in town

without fail the next day, shortly after noon, to meet Reginald at the Reform Club, and he started, perfectly certain that something new had occurred, but not in the least degree surprised. As he was totally disassociated from all human speculations, and as any matter which might have arisen could be no earthly business of his in any way whatever, he concluded that he was called in as arbitrator in something or another of which he was profoundly ignorant. We have seen certain potentates in the same position. Goodge resembled some of those potentates in one thing, he was determined to arbitrate on one particular side, if he should be called on to arbitrate at all.

Reginald met him on the steps of the Club, and they lunched together. Goodge noticed that Reginald was singularly reticent, and would not talk about his

affairs or prosperity in any way. After lunch General Anders came.

He looked fearfully old and anxious ; but quite calm. He said :

“ Goodge, do you know why we sent for you ? ”

“ Of course I do not.”

“ We have singular and most remarkable intelligence,” said the General. “ It is extremely probable that the great lawsuit will come to an end within a month.”

“ Aye ! ” said Goodge, fairly astonished.

“ We think so ; but we want your kind common sense to help us. We have heard much which will entirely surprise you ; but before anything is told to you, I want you as a witness to attend Reginald and myself to open the closed room in Bolton Row.”

“ I am at your service,” said Goodge ; and they walked away through the streets together.

“We shall know the secret now,” said General Anders. “I have been weak, knowing as much as I have known, not to make myself master of the truth before. But I had awful reasons for leaving matters alone. Nothing induces me to act now but a sense of duty; the *dénouement* may kill me, but I have lived long enough.”

“I expect we shall find,” said Goodge, “that there is nothing the matter after all. Mind, I only suspect it, only don’t prepare a tragedy and give us a farce after all these years.”

“They have been bitter dark years to me,” said the General.

“You will brighten your remaining ones by finding the truth,” said Goodge.

No more was said. They went up to the third story in Bolton Row, and into the back room, the room which opened into the concealed one.

The Duke and Duchess were there, both looking very grave. Two other people were there, an old man, Clumber, and his beautiful daughter. The latter both rose as Anders, Reginald, and Goodge came in, and remained standing.

"We will all sit down, if you please," said the Duke, and talk of perfectly indifferent matters for a time. Some gentlemen have yet to arrive, and to witness a very curious statement, which Mr. Clumber is about to make to us. They will not be very long I know. They very naturally desired witnesses on their part, and one of them has gone to seek General Anders, your namesake, my dear general, and the other Mr. Morley."

They sat there rather awkwardly; the Duchess sat beside Ada Clumber and kept her hand in hers. The girl's other hand was in her father's. She was very pale, but looked resolute and calm. The

old man sat close to her, strong in his resolution. Reginald went and talked to them both, kindly and with animation. General Anders sat apart, and would speak with no one.

The door opened, and there were ushered in old General Talbot, young Simpson, young Murdoch, General Anders (our General's namesake) and Mr. Morley. Then the door was shut, and Reginald, when every one had bowed to the other, spoke.

"I think, Mr. Clumber, that the time has come for you to speak, and to open all eyes to a matter which might have been known long ago, and which might have saved us all from a great deal of trouble if it had been discovered. Speak without fear of offence, sir; whatever your life may have been, you have now ample time to make atonement for any thing you have done. Gentlemen, I am

bound to say that Mr. Clumber has, in this latest act of his life, behaved like an honest man."

Clumber rose and spoke while they all sat silent.

"I am a very old man, gentlemen, and I have a deal to answer for; but my daughter here has been talking to me a good deal, and I am determined to make a clean breast of the whole matter. I came to England, gentlemen, for the purpose of making a bargain about what I know with Mr. Bevan."

"With Mr. Bevan!" said Reginald; "what had he to do with it?"

"Mr. Bevan, sir, is James Murdoch, and Count Theodorides is George Simpson, the forger," said the old man quietly, and every one looked at every one else. Young Murdoch and young Simpson did not appear to be half as much astonished as might have been anticipated.

“That is the state of the case, gentlemen. Well, on the voyage my daughter here—she ain’t my daughter, but a better daughter than one in a thousand—she takes me in hand. She points out to me that I ain old and not poor, and that I can never die happy with this on my mind. Consequently I determines to do what is right. If you gentlemen choose to make my wife a present for my thwarting her *and* doing what is right, why it will save words and worse. But I want you to understand that my daughter’s words have took effect with me, and that I am doing what is right because it *is* right and not wrong. Consequently I tell you that merchant Digby made a will subsequent to that which was found, proved, and be-devilled, till his original will, in which he left his whole property to the devil, might just as well have been carried out in full, according to his original instruc-

tions. That second will, in which the devil was never so much as mentioned once, was witnessed by the Dickers the night after he spoke in Parliament for the last time, and on the night before he died. How much General Anders knows of that will I cannot say at all."

"I swear to you, my friends, that I merely suspected that the document was a will, but nothing more. I knew that there was some document in there (pointing to the wall), but my father's curse, and some nameless terror which is there still, prevented my daring to look for it. I have been very weak, you must try to forgive me."

Clumber continued amidst dumb silence: "The Dickers used to speak to one another about this paper, and it was always on their consciences. The old man always told them that the opening of that room would be the ruin of the boy. So they

kept on thinking of it until they were as frightened about it as he is now. They covered the door with plaster from the outside, and put up iron shutters from the outside; then they made out that the old man's ghost was there, and with one thing and another they humbugged themselves, the General, and everybody but me. Living in the house as I did, I saw the shutters put up, they would not let the man go into the room, and so they were put on with simple screws from the outside. After I went wrong I always thought of how easy it was to get into that room from the outside, by merely drawing the screws with a driver, I knowing that there were no nuts inside; and once when I was in England I did so. I found the paper; and I come into this house to-night to make a clean breast of it, and give that paper up."

"This man," said young Murdoch,

“has communicated with all of us in the most frank manner, and I believe that he is honest in his present intentions. Still, we must guard ourselves from a great fraud. If such a will exists, I think that I speak but the authority of my father, of Simpson’s father, and of you, General Talbot, that it will never be disputed whatsoever its provisions may be ; we, however, require the stoutest proofs of its antiquity. At present we know absolutely nothing. This gentleman gives us to understand that he possessed himself of this will. Where is it then ; have you got it here ? ”

“ I have not,” said Clumber.

“ Where is it then ? ” said young Murdoch. “ You will do yourself no good by playing with us. Where is this will ; and how soon can we see it ? ”

“ The will is in the next room, and you can see it in ten minutes if General

Anders is agreeable to open the old room at last."

"In the next room!" cried young Simpson. "Do you mean in the closed room?"

"I do. I never dared take it from there; I only hid it. If my wife knew that she would kill me. When I got in there and found it I was frightened to bring it away, and I planted it. I never was a man who could go through with anything."

"Then you mean to say," said General Talbot, "that the will is in there now."

"Yes. I always calculated on getting through those shutters again, and fetching it away, but what with old age and lumbago—I mean what with my daughter's persuasions to lead a better life—I determined to be an honest man over the matter. There is nothing between you and the will but some lath and plaster, and General Anders's permission."

"Isabel, you had better go away,"

said General Anders firmly; and Isabel went.

“Now, gentlemen,” said General Anders, “I suppose after what has passed that you will require me to open this room.”

“General,” said Talbot, “there is not a man in the room but what is your hearty friend. You are, it is said, ruined in pocket, but let that pass. If you are ruined, it has come about mainly by this ridiculous secret; and I tell you fairly, that from what we have heard now it *must* be solved, at whatever sacrifice to your feelings.”

“Cousin Talbot,” said the General, “you shall not have much trouble.”

“Did you say ‘cousin?’” said General Talbot.

“I did. The time is come when all of you must know what is only known at present to Reginald Hetherege, and my sister, and Mr. Goodge.”

“Your sister!” exclaimed Talbot.

“Yes,” said General Anders. “I am the son of Digby the merchant; the Duchess is his daughter also. Can you now conceive my hesitation in opening this room? Can you now understand what you must have considered my insanity about the matter? In this room lies the secret of my mother’s dishonour, and that, I fear, of Isabel’s mother also. I have been preparing to open this room for years; follow me into it, and learn with prying eyes the secret of some crime too great for Divine mercy.”

“My dear fellow,” said Goodge, “I think that everybody present understands your delicacy. I am one of the few to whom you have confided your origin. Let us be practical. Let us get the wall broken down, and let us take this gentleman, Mr. Clumber, in, escorted by a Hetherege, a Talbot, a Simpson, and a

Murdoch. I will go as arbitrator. Not one single paper beyond the will shall be disturbed: whatever secrets Digby left behind him are no one's property save yours and the Duchess's. Come, I was not sent for here to-night for nothing. Is that your will, gentlemen all?"

"I say yes," said General Talbot; "but I am utterly overwhelmed. Are you the 'handsome boy'?"

"I am," said General Anders. "I have kept my secret well. Do you gentlemen understand and forgive me now?"

There was a general murmur of sympathy for him in the midst of their curiosity. He left the room.

"Did you know this, Reginald?" said young Murdoch.

"Of course I did. Goodge and Hester and I have known it for years."

General Anders returned with a small crowbar and a key. Five minutes sufficed

to remove the lath and plaster sufficiently to allow the passage of a man. A pair of folding doors covered with cobwebs appeared beyond. General Anders fitted the key in the door, and after a few efforts made it turn, he passed into the room—the room of mystery and terror to him, and then came out, asking them to follow him and bring a light.

CHAPTER XX.

OLD DIGBY'S REAL WILL.

THE first thing which struck every one when they followed and the room was quite illuminated, was the fact that two pictures were in extremely prominent places on each side of a tall escritoire—those of a beautiful boy and a beautiful girl. In the face of the boy General Talbot recognized the face of General Anders who stood beneath it, in the face of the girl the Duke recognised his wife. “Yet,” he thought, “she must have been a child when the room was closed, and that is a woman of thirty, it must be her mother.” There was a name under the

picture, and before any one had time to read it, the Duke quietly broke off the projecting piece of plaster on which the name was written with the crowbar, and put it in his pocket.

The room was deeply covered with dust everywhere. Only one human being had entered it for more than half a century, and that being was Clumber. He coolly came in and asked Murdoch and Simpson to look around them, and see where the dust had been disturbed. They could not see any difference anywhere, but Goodge held them back and laughed low.

“If this man speaks truth,” he said, “I will find this paper without his assistance. No one has been in this room for several years; no one was in the tomb of Asifiat for twenty years before I entered, yet I could trace the footsteps of Belsoni. Mr. Clumber, you came in at that window, you came straight to this desk. You

trampled about it a great deal; then you went straight to the fireplace, and put the paper there; then you came back again and paused irresolutely once. Then you went back to the window. Just hold your light here, and you will see his feet in the dust, covered pretty deeply, but still pretty visible."

Now he showed it to them it was obvious enough. Goodge went to the fireplace and stood perfectly puzzled.

"Come, Mr. Clumber, I want you here, I am quite beaten."

The fireplace was an old brick one, with dogs, and with Dutch tiles spreading out on the floor. Clumber brushed the dust away from one of the Dutch tiles and raised it; he took out a paper and gave it to General Talbot. They went out, into the other room, Clumber and General Anders bringing up the rear.

"There is lots more there," he whis-

pered to General Anders, as they lagged behind. "There is all you want to know there. That is where your father used to hide all his things, and that is why he left the will in the desk, so that it might be more easy found. I heard of his hiding-place from the old folks when I was listening. I put the will there so as no one should find it. From what I heard them tell, I should burn all the papers there if I was in your place. They are no good to you or the Duchess. He was an awful old man by all accounts. I wouldn't make or meddle with reading them if he had been *my* father." And so they passed into the lighted room, and sat down.

Young Murdoch opened the will and read it to himself. "I do not suppose, he said, "speaking on my own responsibility, that it will be in the least degree likely that any member of this family

will be foolish enough to dispute this. I will go further. I do not believe that it is any one's interest to do so. The principal persons concerned in it are all well represented here; is any one dissatisfied as to its antiquity? Are we to believe this man Clumber's story, or are we not? If we do not, we must at once charge him with an impudent fraud, committed some years ago, and place him at once in the first rank of clever criminals? If we do believe his story, a very great difficulty is solved, and there will be no trouble about a compromise. The water-mark on the paper is that of 1770. The ink is brown, the date of the will is a day after the famous one."

"Look at the edges of the paper," said Goodge, "it may be torn out of some book in a public library."

"All four edges are white," said young Murdoch.

“Try it with water,” said General Anders the second. “It may be forged in sepia. Let us have no humbug.”

It resisted water, however. There was no doubt about its antiquity; they were all obliged to admit that.

“Then,” said young Murdoch, “I should say that many lawyers will be thrown out of employment. Digby, our great relative, in this will makes proportionably nearly the same division of his property as he did in the other will; but he alters it in one remarkable manner. Instead of deferring the administration of his property to the time when every male relative alive at the time of his death should be dead, he limits the time to twenty years after his decease. I, like the rest of our family, have been sick of this long Chancery suit, and have been only waiting to move in the matter on our cousin Reginald’s death. Our cousin

Reginald has so greatly endeared himself to all of us, by his patience under difficulties, and his generosity during his prosperity, that I am sure the whole family would feel in his death that they had suffered an irreparable loss. If any kind of compromise can be come to under this will, it is evident to me, from the action I and my cousin Simpson took when we believed George dead, and from the inquiries we made then, that I must congratulate our cousin Reginald on the possession of at least half a million of money. It will probably, I should say, be a great deal more, and will certainly be no less. We all profit more or less by this will, the most unfortunate thing is that it will be published."

"Why so?"

"It makes General Anders and the Duchess very little richer than they were before; there is no disgrace to either of

them in it, but it is a sad *exposé* of a wicked old man's life."

General Anders looked at it, and let it drop on the floor.

"I have made myself an honourable place in the world by my own exertions, and in my old age I am dragged into disgrace by my father. I have deserved it. But Isabel, she will die at having her shame published."

"The Duchess," said the Duke, airily and pleasantly, "is, like her brother, far too good and too noble a person to be dragged into any infamy at all. Given all this to be true, it is very bad, it is horrible, it is inconceivable, but, *ma foi*, I cannot conceive how it affects the Duchess in any way. You English have no sense. My grandfather was a notorious reprobate, and only became a political saint by being most righteously guillotined. General, my dear, you have

ruined your life over the sentimental folly of your father's sins ; I pray you learn wisdom. As for the Duchess's honour, that is in *my* keeping. Have you not had lessons enough about this nonsense ? Here, through all kinds of trouble, is everything right again. Cease your restless speculations, and be happy with us."

There was a general conversation and a general agreement on all points ; at last a woman's voice was heard, which commanded attention at once. It was the voice of Ada, the Australian girl.

"Then I understand, gentlemen, that this compromise which you are proposing does not benefit Mr. George Hetherege in any way. It is very hard upon me, for I worked for him and for him solely."

"And nobly too, my girl," said Reginald. "Everything I have is his ; you have done a brave day's work. You say

that it is no benefit to him; remember that I am not long for this world, and that what you have done for me you have done for him."

The girl was contented, but the father pleaded for himself. He said that he was an honest man, and hoped they would reward him. They said that they knew nothing certain as yet; and his daughter led him away and left them talking.

CHAPTER XXI.

HOLLINGSCROFT AGAIN.

No great difficulty occurred as regards the compromise over the great suit, except an attempt on the part of Bevan to get his share in an underhand way, which gave rise to certain complications. The agreement of James Murdoch was formally necessary, according to his own showing ; and after a wrangle, in which their strong card was the threat of exposing his real name and position, and his was stopping all proceedings, his agreement was bought for more than it was really worth, and he departed to America with his financial genius and a large sum of money.

It was everybody's interest to get the whole matter settled, and it did not take very long to do so. There was more money left than any one expected, as in the Thellusson case. Reginald was now in a splendid position as head of the family, and his financial difficulties were easily tided over by the unanimous support of the other principal members. His security secured the position of General Anders, and he quietly withdrew from all his bolder schemes with no very great loss to himself or any one else. Once more Reginald had peace before him, and laid himself out to enjoy it, and end his long and stormy life.

Hollingscroft was now unanimously pronounced to be the most delightful place in the world, and every cruel word which had been said of it was quite forgotten. The house was soon as full, as cheery, and as bright as it had ever been in its best

times; every one was master there except Reginald. It pleased him very much, for he said that it would divert his mind from ordinary matters, and leave him, he said laughing, leisure to complete the great work of his life.

“And what is that?” asked Goodge.

“The history of my parliamentary career,” said Reginald. “That will be one of the great books of the future.”

Goodge urged that it would tax his brain too much, and begged him to leave the materials behind him to be written after his death.

“No; but really,” said Reginald, “to leave joking, I must take the Chiltern Hundreds. My presence in Parliament is too awful a scandal. I was not there fifteen times the whole of last session! You people never ought to have forced me in: I have out-heroded Herod in my cool laziness.”

“Never mind,” said Goodge, “you can do more in future. Don’t leave Parliament, it will do you all the good in the world;” and Reginald yielded, sorely against his will, and, as usual, allowed himself to be disposed of, when he had ten thousand times better have taken his own way.

Hollingscroft was now also discovered by the county generally to be the most charming place in the whole of Dorsetshire, and Reginald to be the most popular man. He had been that once before, and did not very particularly care about it one way or another. He, however, said now, in confidence to Aunt Hester, that if they could only quarrel with the Snizorts, there was nothing to prevent their being happy.

“My dear soul,” said Aunt Hester, “I have quarrelled with the woman violently four times, but she will make it up

again. I can't do anything with her at all."

"Ah!" said the Duchess smiling, "if I had my old spirit I would have managed her. She is certainly intolerable—she is enough to drive one into a nunnery; I am too nervous now to fight her." They looked at her with great sympathy, and Mrs. Hickson silently bent over her and kissed her. She was more than a daughter to her now, for a terrible shock had befallen her. In spite of every kind effort to the contrary, she had managed to see the awful will made by the godless old man just before his death. From it she learned the shameful secret of her birth and of her half brother; she never appeared in the world any more, and left London, where she had been so popular, for ever. The Duke was devoted and unremitting in his attentions to her, more like a lover than a husband, but the cruel old man's

blow had fallen, and had fallen heavily. The Duke tried Lorraine for her, and took her to St. Privat, but the long hedgeless, treeless fields, the long military roads, and the weary drives to Briey, which was dull, and to Metz, which was noisy, bored her ; and the Duke very soon got tired of it himself, and at the first faint signal from her, brought her back to England. She would not face Paris now, for she supposed that everybody would know all about her. This worthy couple settled permanently in England close to Hollingscroft, to be near her brother ; for he never left that place now. Nearly sixty years of honour and excitement had very much aged him, and the dreadful blow inflicted on him by this *esclandre* about his father's domestic relations (he had always known that his father and mother were not married, and used to consider himself a Falconbridge, but never had known the

worst), entirely drove him from the world. The soldier and the dandy, the financier and capitalist, were now represented by a tall humble old gentleman with a grey moustache, who walked swiftly about the country, talking to labourers, and travelling tinkers and gipsies even, asking them curious simple questions about their trades, and always leaving them with the idea that he had made a grand discovery for improving their way of doing their trade, or their mode of life. At dinner he would expatiate with almost childish eagerness on something which a travelling chair or clock mender had told him, and enlarge on some scheme for teaching them their trade better than they knew it themselves.

At last, in his wanderings, the good old man found an old soldier, who had served with him, going to the workhouse with his wife. He stopped *that*, and came back to dinner very much flurried and

nervous. He had a new scheme which as he told Goodge, he was determined to hammer on while the iron was hot. He had still between eighty and ninety thousand pounds left, and his scheme was to expend the whole of it on a grand almshouse which should stand between old couples going to the workhouse, as far as the money could go. "The sum is utterly insufficient," he said, "and my great age renders it absolutely necessary that I should set to work on the scheme at once, so as to attend to the details. I might have been in the workhouse myself, you know, if it had not been for you, Reginald." He was with great difficulty prevented from carrying out his scheme in its entirety, and only yielded from his profound belief in Reginald's powers of theoretical finance, and Goodge's shrewdness as a man of the world. He, however, after they had pointed out to him that he might

do better with his money, and might personally superintend a smaller establishment, built an almshouse on his own plan, the care of which kept him healthily busy and fussy for the rest of his life. Reginald insisted on giving the land, and General Anders begrudgingly allowed him to do so.

Reginald's yacht, a totally useless institution was, on the arrival home of Captain Hickson, C.B., at once taken possession of by that gallant officer, newly rigged, and newly painted. Haddonsmouth was rather inclined to resent Captain Hickson's interference with their property, for the inhabitants had long considered the yacht to belong to them, and Hickson declared that she was used as a storehouse for stolen goods. It is certain that she would have been seized a dozen times over for smuggling had not the coastguard officers entertained a most wholesome fear of troubling the Haddonsmouth people in

any way. Captain Hickson, however, had a mortal prejudice against these people, because he was perfectly certain that some of them must have connived at the attack made on Reginald's life on the night of his arrival. He got them into excellent good order, and ruled them with a rod of iron. The scandal which the place had given rise to was removed.

The yacht, bought like a pig in a poke by Reginald, was found by Captain Hickson to be an exceedingly beautiful and valuable craft. Reginald consulted Hickson, and came to a determination about her, which he ultimately carried out, but which must be passed over now in favour of far weightier matters. The long-slumbering squabble between Lord Snizort and Sir Lipscombe Barnett had come to a culmination, and the lord lieutenant of the county, being old, nervous, and infirm, had shut himself up in his castle

with a view of escaping to Italy, by the secret assistance of a staunch and loyal tenantry, until less dangerous times should dawn upon his distracted county.

The chances against the escape of the lord lieutenant to Italy were very strong. The county was out from Weymouth to Poole, and the Pilgrimage of Grace in Yorkshire was nothing to the present war. The women, as is usual in war, were hottest over the matter, and they involved their husbands, who, like the lazy brutes they are, would gladly have kept out of it. The Archers, who were the most overwhelmingly powerful body in the county, were mostly on the side of Sir Lipscombe. Very few of them joined the ranks of Lord Snizort. The first actual skirmish was at the meeting of the Dorset Toxopholites, at which the forces on both sides were present in full numbers, the Barnett faction being, however, in a strong

majority. Matters assumed the form of an armed neutrality, until Mrs. Pennyfeather (Snizort), and Miss Gold (Barnett), had a violent fracas over the latter lady's score. One lady was led away by her husband, the other by her father; the two gentlemen were now committed to war. In the mean time, the lord lieutenant, having secreted himself for a time at the house of Cardinal ——— at ———, succeeded in reaching Poole, from whence he took ship to Cherbourg, and so got safely to Italy. He elected to die there, and carried out his intention some years afterwards, full of years and of honour.

The cause of the great county war was the absolute refusal of Lady Snizort to receive Mrs. George Barnett. Not only not to receive her, but to enter any house where she was received. Most people would have got over the last difficulty with the greatest ease, for Lady Snizort

was a terror to the county ; but the Snizorts were very powerful people, and gave very great entertainments. A minority therefore rallied round the Snizorts, while the vast majority of young ladies and matrons, seeing that George Barnett was irrevocably lost, made up their minds to the theory that he had been deceived and coney-catched by an artful girl and her father, but emphatically refused to permit their husbands and fathers to quarrel with Sir Lipscombe in consequence of the shameless behaviour of his son.

The lord lieutenant was an old bachelor who used to entertain a great deal, and who, being an ancient Whig of reverent age, was politically offensive to nobody. The Snizort-Barnett affair had been at once referred to him. He, seeing no way out of it, was at once taken ill, and ultimately, as we have seen, took refuge in Italy.

Having no other victim, the county naturally came on Reginald. If there was no other victim to be found, he was of course the man. Now the most popular man in the county, he was made arbitrator, and his foes were those of his own household.

They took various sides in the great controversy. Aunt Hester stood out boldly for the Barnetts, and was followed by the other women of the family. Reginald himself was strongly adverse to having anything whatever to do with the matter; and for a time very much longed to follow the lord lieutenant to Italy, when a disaster occurred to him which had been long foreseen. He was on the list of sheriffs for the year, and Her Majesty, not in the least degree desiring to do him any mortal injury, pricked him.

It became necessary for him to declare himself. Mrs. George and her husband were openly asked to the sheriff's ball;

the Snizorts and he were deadly enemies from that time forward, and the Snizorts at once went to Persia, and stayed there a long time. Lady Snizort wore trousers and smoked, but she never parted from her bonnet or umbrella. "After all," said Reginald, "it cuts both ways—we get rid of the Snizorts, which is something, and we have offended no one of any importance. If we had, it would not be of the remotest consequence to me. I am a little too old to care for anything now; but they might have left me alone."

The changeful life which he had led, and the strange shifts in it, seemed to repeat themselves continually before his eyes in a curious manner now. Aunt Hester was exactly the same as ever, an extremely bright and lively old lady, but who had taken in her age to flowers—things she previously used to despise, and spent her time in an endless wrangle with the gardener. She had a novel on the

stocks, and she showed him two volumes of it. He liked it very much, and wrote a review of it before it was finished, in the most complimentary style. The review and the novel may both be found in their unpublished posthumous works. Mary was the same, only that she was getting a little grey, and, for the first time in her life, a little obstinate on the subject of George's going to sea again. The Duke and Duchess were the same, save that the Duke had in his old age become earnest about something, and that thing was roses, and the Duchess was backing him up through thick and thin, in opposing Aunt Hester and the gardener in their way of managing Reginald's flower beds. Goodge was the same, except that he was a little greyer and rather more beloved by every one than even he was before. Hickson and his wife had not changed at all since the time when he was a poor

captain and she a London beauty. Anders was changed a little, but very little. He was as eager and earnest now over his new scheme of the almshouses, as he ever had been over a battle or a speculation. All Reginald's friends seemed to have some hope in life except himself. He seemed to have outlived all hope or all sorrow, and to be waiting for the end.

A request was a command with him now. It always had been, but in old times he would merely acquiesce passively, now, the only activity he showed was in exerting himself to oblige other people. Mr. Owthwaite spoke solemnly to him on this point as his spiritual adviser, but he was petulant with Mr. Owthwaite over the matter, and indeed that gentleman and he never got on very well together, the clergyman saying that Reginald was ridiculously weak, and Reginald saying, in confidence to Aunt Hester, that Owth-

waite was a spiritual bully. In this Sir Lipscombe Barnett entirely agreed. Mr. Owthwaite and Sir Lipscombe had once made it up at Reginald's expense, and retired to mourn in secret; but now that their mutual enemy, Snizort, had departed to Persia, they lived what Mrs. Quickly called "a very frampold life" together, neither of them ever saying anything which the other did not, as a Christian, a gentleman, and a Briton, find it necessary flatly to contradict on the spot and refer to Reginald as arbitrator. Reginald always arbitrated wrong in the opinion of one party, and very often in the opinion of both, so he ended his days with the opinion that the proper end for insoluble national difficulties was the old one—war. "For," he said, "arbitration gives both parties the power of making a deadly enemy of the third and innocent party, who has no earthly business in the matter at all."

CHAPTER THE LAST.

AFTER one of these arbitrations Emily Hickson came to him as he was sitting on the lawn. She had been up to London buying her clothes for the ball, at which she was first to appear as a full-grown woman; that is to say, she was going to "come out." She was very pretty, and she had endeared herself to all of them by the capital way in which she had behaved during the troubles, now three years passed. She sat down at his knee.

"Mr. Hetherege," she said, "I wish I could be more to you than I am. I wish

you would try me. I wish that you would make a friend of me. I am really to be trusted."

"My dear, you are my friend."

"Than I am the only one you have got," she said, "except George and his mother. George, come here and sit by me, and let us tell him what we mean."

George came and sat down by her upon the grass. He took one of Reginald's hands in his, while he gave the other to Emily.

"Mr. Hetherege," said Emily, "you have been good and kind to every one, but you have no friends who understand you as we do. Cast your eyes round on the people you have benefited so deeply; they are all good, but does any of them know you? Are you not always 'Poor Reginald' with them all except with Mrs. Hetherege, who went through it all with you—I mean Mary, the mother of

this boy? We three never call you ‘Poor Reginald.’ To us you are Mr. Hetherege, the best, wisest, and noblest of men. From Mrs. Hetherege I have heard the story of your whole life, and it seems to me that you have always cared for others more than for yourself. I want you to think that George and I will try to do the same. The others do not understand you as we do. The reason is, I suppose, that we are children, and that you will be a child till you die.”

“Yes, my dear, I know it; I have been nothing but a child all my life. I suppose I could not help it; I never could help anything. Yes, I am a child.”

“Aye!” said the girl rising, “and He took one and set him in the midst of them all. That is what He did. Grandfather!”

“Why do you call me so, dearest?”

“Give George and me your blessing,

for we are going to share the rest of our lives together."

A bright flush, like the dying sunset on the window of a cathedral, showing a blaze of light to the outer world, but casting a heaven of jewelled glory through the darkening aisles within, shone over Reginald's face as he blessed them. "It is all as I wished; I will die as I have lived—a child among children."

"Take him with us," said the brisk Emily; "we know where to find our mother, do we not, George. Come with us, child Reginald, and we will gather flowers together. Come, for there is some one to see you—the prettiest flower of them all, *I* think, and George was in love with her, and she was in love with George. Come along, my dear, no one understands you but us."

Reginald went away with them, but more feeble in his walk than in old times.

One on each side of him, the noble pleasant-faced youth, and the pretty brisk girl, gathered flowers as they passed on, and gave them to him to hold for them, petulantly telling him to be very careful of them, for that they were all for him, and that the other people who were always getting him into trouble when they ought to have left him quiet, never attended to the flowers in his study. So they talked and prattled beside him until they came to a turn in one of the alleys before one of the windows of the hall.

Reginald knew the place well. Under the towering mass of rhododendrons before him was the grave of the bloodhound, who had died for him on the night of his first arrival at Hollingscroft. In front of the flowers, walking up and down, were his old Mary and a beautiful young lady, whom he at once recognized as Ada Honey.

“It is a strange place to meet, Miss Honey,” he said. She did not understand him, but came forward and bowed to him.

“I trust that everything is well with you, Miss Honey,” said Reginald.

“I am Miss Honey no longer,” said that young lady. “I am happily married, and I came here to take leave of you, sir, and to thank you for all your kindness. I have married an American gentleman, and I am going to Illinois with him, taking my father; and so we shall see the weary old Australia no more for ever.”

“Take this ring to him, madam,” said Reginald, “and tell him that he has a jewel in his wife brighter than that stone. Good-bye. He has heard what took place here;” and so he turned away with George and Emily, not seeing the extremely anxious glance which Mary sent after him.

“My dears,” he said to George and Emily, when they were alone together among the flowers, “the place where she was standing was the very place from which they shot at me. At me who never injured a human being. The poor dog died to defend me, the only creature, before heaven, who ever risked its life for me. When I am gone, remember that dog’s grave; but now let us be children among the flowers. You must carry some of these, you two, for my hands are full; but we will have plenty while we are at it, I beg of you.”

In one of the garden walks, blazing with flowers, they met Captain Hickson and Goodge, who had come from the sea, and who had been dredging (in Reginald’s yacht, of course). They were horribly dirty and very much excited; they had a beastly conglomeration of creatures from the bottom of the sea, never originally

happy, but now in all phases of misery, ranging from fury to degradation, at being removed from the places where Divine Providence had placed them, that is to say, as far out of reach as possible. Reginald was called upon to admire these, but he laughed, and said that he was busy with the flowers. So Goodge and Hickson went home and pickled them.

“Would you like the yacht, George?” said Reginald.

George drew his breath. “I can sail her, grandpa. I don’t know what I should do if you gave me the yacht. You should not talk of such things.”

“She is yours, my dear,” said Reginald. “We will get some more flowers now, and to-morrow morning I will go and see you sail her.”

George was dumb, and even Emily shook her head as if she could not understand it. George had got a real ship of

his own, none of your twopenny-half-penny Admiralty appointments, but a real ship of one hundred tons, all his own for ever.

“I don’t think, grandpa,” he said solemnly, “that any human being ever gave any one else such intense pleasure as you have given me. Come down to Haddonsmouth to-morrow morning and see me beat her out to sea. You will come, won’t you?”

“I said that no one understood him but ourselves,” said Emily. “I shall go.”

And so the three rambled home through the alleys of the garden with their flowers.

All that night the boy George, like a true man-of-war’s man, was down at Haddonsmouth, cleaning away Goodge’s dirt, and setting the beautiful craft to rights. In the morning he was at Reginald’s bedroom, and his valet told him

that his master had not been well in the night, but was better.

Reginald, however, was bent on seeing how George could sail the yacht, and, having had his breakfast, went in a pony-carriage to the harbour, where he took up a place on the cliff with Mary and Emily, in a comfortable corner facing the south-west, from which quarter the wind was blowing. They had not been there a quarter of an hour before they saw George at work. Two boats towed him just beyond the rocks, and then up went his canvas like lightning, and he began beating to windward, playing with the pretty vessel as if she was a new toy. Reginald seemed to watch with great interest for a long time, and then he said "Mary !"

She was beside him at once.

"Don't ever say a single unkind word to Anders. He was very foolish about

that closed room, but he was not so much to blame. And always think of me at my best. Don't think of me as a clever man; I have been that, but then I was at my worst; think of me as I am now—one who never willingly injured anybody, a mere child. Good-bye."

She hurriedly put her hand upon his heart, but it had ceased to beat for ever. The flower which Emily had put into his hand had fallen from it on the grass, and the patient soul of Reginald Hetherege, with all its weaknesses and errors, was face to face with its God at last.

* * * * *

They made a pleasant grave for him in the shadow of the church on the north side, where the snow laid long in winter, and where the summer shadows were coolest and most profound—the quietest spot in the whole churchyard. For some

years the passing villagers would often see a bent lady and gentleman, both very old, who sat silently together by the simple headstone. After a time there were two graves, and the bent old General slept in one of them, while the old lady used to be brought there by children, and left for a time alone. At last there were three graves side by side, all tangled together in summer with flowers planted by loving hands, and in winter swept by the same winds and beaten by the same rains. Reginald lay in the centre between his two friends ; and the children—George and Emily's children—got to believe from a dream of the youngest of them, some years after his death, that he would rise first from the dead on the resurrection morning, and then would awaken General Anders and Aunt Hester, and that the three would come and tell them that Christ was coming ; a foolish dream which

had got into the little maid's head from hearing the three old people so continually talked of by those who were left. The child was so full of her fancy for a time, that she would climb from her bed in the early summer morning and look towards the churchyard without fear, to see if the good and gentle Reginald had awakened, and was bringing the others to tell them the great news. For they all spoke of him as one who had lived without blame, and fallen asleep without death. So the child had no terrors about such a passing away as his. In the summer she would go quietly by herself, and whisper through the grass into his ear, to know if Christ would come to-morrow; and when she died in autumn, they laid her by Reginald's head at her desire, so that she might take the hand of the good man, whom she had never seen but had learned to love from hearsay,

and pass into the Eternal Presence with him.

So he sleeps—happy at last.

“Thou wilt not turn upon thy bed.

Chaunteth not the brooding bee

Sweeter tones than calumny :

Let them rave.

Thou wilt never raise thine head

From the green that folds thy grave :

Let them rave.”

THE END.

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